



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 6.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 16, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

PRISONERS OF WAR; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY IN LIMBO.

By LEUT HARRY LEE.



It was hard to surrender, but Will Prentiss knew it was necessary, as many of his brave boys were wounded. So he stepped out with the flag of truce. Firing ceased and an officer and guard marched down from the Union line.

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CHAPTER I.

UNDER MARCHING ORDERS.

Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays, had just stepped out of his tent at five o'clock on the morning of November 28th, 1861. At that early hour there was but little stir in the Confederate camp.

Just five miles away was Manassas, the headquarters of General Beauregard. The Confederate line extended many miles in either direction, presenting a barrier to the advance of the Army of the Potomac.

The war was on. The great difference of opinion between the North and South upon various questions was to be decided upon the battlefield. Rivers of blood were to flow. Brave and true men of both sides were to offer up their lives as a sacrifice upon the altar of what they deemed national pride and honor.

Through all time that great civil strife must be regarded as one of the saddest and the mightiest in history. From the ashes of that conflict, however, has arisen a better understanding and a kindred spirit which all time cannot efface.

With sectional differences now long dead and of the past

it is fitting to write impartially of the brave deeds of the soldiers of both armies.

Therefore this story will deal with the remarkable exploits and adventures of a company of young Virginia youths, all members of the first families of the Old Dominion, who banded themselves together to fight for the Stars and Bars under the name of the Virginia Grays.

Captain Will Prentiss, son of Colonel Jeff Prentiss, was a handsome athletic youth of dauntless spirit and high character.

His first lieutenant was Fred Randolph, a scion of an old Richmond family. Dick Walton was second lieutenant and Joe Spotswood was first sergeant.

The Grays had been but a few days in camp and were just becoming reorganized, after a hard expedition in the vicinity of Nolan's Ferry, on the Upper Potomac.

More than fifteen of the brave little company had left their bones on the battlefields of that trip. But the Grays had carried the enterprise through with credit and won great praise from the commanding general.

They were now really awaiting orders.

McClellan had just come into his command of the Army of the Potomac. As is well known in history, that famous general proceeded to put his army upon a basis of efficiency such as no other army had ever excelled.

But a period of inactivity, so far as the bulk of the two armies was concerned, ensued.

Despite this, however, the country between the lines of the armies was raided and fought over constantly between small detachments of cavalry and infantry.

Some of these so-called skirmishes really assumed the dignity of battles.

Captain Prentiss, as we note in the opening lines of our story, had just stepped out of his tent. The sentry outside saluted him.

The morning was clear and cool. The air was invigorating and the sky was like a limpid blue dome.

The boy captain of the Grays ran his eye critically down the company street. He saw with satisfaction that all was orderly and that every sentry was at his post.

"Hemans," he said to the sentry, "when Lieutenant Randolph appears tell him to report to me on the western line of intrenchments."

"Yes, sir!" replied the sentry, and he resumed his methodical step.

Captain Prentiss, with sword and belt in his right hand, walked lightly away. In a few moments he had reached the intrenchments.

He inspected them critically. The Grays were some distance in advance of the main line of the army. Far away to the south the colors of the various regiments could be seen flaunting in the breeze.

But miles to the north Will saw that which caused him a start. It was a dull, heavy pall, which at first seemed a part of the landscape.

But, as it mounted upward, he saw that it was smoke. There was a faint vibration of the atmosphere, like that caused by very distant thunder.

In an instant his gaze kindled.

Will Prentiss knew what it meant. There was fighting afar off there, perhaps ten miles away. It was an engagement of a serious sort.

The distant booming was the fire of artillery. He tried to locate mentally the position of the contending forces.

He reckoned that it was far beyond and to the east of Germantown. It could not be Fairfax Courthouse or even Vienna.

For a time the boy captain watched and listened to the distant evidences of battle. Finally he turned to continue his inspection of the earthworks, when he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs.

An orderly dashed up and saluted.

"Captain Will Prentiss?"

"Yes," replied Will.

"Orders for you from General Beauregard."

With a thrill Will took the letter. It was to him a relief to receive orders, for the inactivity of the last few days was irksome.

He at once burst the seal and read the orders as follows:

"To Captain Prentiss: Immediately upon receipt of this, march your company to cotton plantation north of Germantown. There you are to hold the turnpike to Pleas-

ant Valley. A large body of Union infantry and cavalry, with some artillery, is trying to turn our line at that point. I have selected your company for this important mission in recognition of your efficient work of the past. I will send you support if it proves necessary.

"(Signed) BEAUREGARD, General Commanding."

Will folded the letter and replied:

"You may report to General Beauregard that we move forward within an hour. Ask him to send us a few baggage wagons for our camp equipage."

The orderly saluted, and, wheeling his horse, rode away.

Just then a tall, handsome young officer, in a fine uniform, came hastily up. He saluted and said:

"I report to you, captain, as you have ordered."

"All right, Fred," said Will, relaxing his dignity, "I have good news."

"What is it?"

"Orders from General Beauregard to proceed north to the Germantown turnpike and hold it against an advance of the Union troops."

"Good!" cried Fred, joyfully. "When are we to start?"

"Now!"

"Hurrah! I will order the reveille beaten at once. The boys will be delighted."

Fred Randolph, the young lieutenant of the Grays, hurried away. In a few moments the drums were beating the roll and the boys came tumbling out of their blankets.

So well drilled were the Grays that in a very few minutes they were forming and ready for orders.

But it was an hour before the company was ready to start on its march.

Of course, there were many preparations to make. The boys had to have their breakfast and an allowance of rations for the long march of over twenty miles.

The tents were struck and packed aboard wagons. These took up the rear. But finally, with beat of drum and note of fife, they marched away.

And a fine appearance they made, with quick step, alert manner, and the sun gleaming on polished arms and handsome uniforms.

They were soon well out on the highway and beyond the picket line.

What was before them they could only guess. But a soldier's life is one of danger and hardship, and they could expect nothing less. But this did not daunt them.

All day they marched over dusty roads and under the autumn sun. Finally they came to the shore of a stream which had cut its way through high banks of sandstone. On either side was a heavy growth of oak.

Beyond the country was rolling with deep glens and high eminences. Will called the company to a halt.

As there was no bridge or ferry, it was necessary to look for a ford.

A small squad went down to the water's edge. It was found that the stream was very deep and to ford it was out of the question.

They had left the highway an hour previous. It had been

deemed advisable to cut across the country in order to reach the designated point on the Pleasant Valley road.

Far in the distance could still be heard the faint rattle of musketry, which was evidence that the skirmish line was still active between the two armies.

Will was exceedingly anxious to reach the position assigned him by General Beauregard before darkness should fall.

He was much disappointed that no fordway could be found at this point. For some moments he was in a quandary. He did not dare to venture too far up the stream for fear of running into an ambushade or finding himself cut off by a superior force of the foe.

For he knew that they were perilously near the Union lines.

At any moment they might run upon their outposts. It was well to proceed with caution.

So the boy captain deliberated seriously and considered every possible plan for crossing the stream before them.

There was no suitable material at hand for a raft.

Even if there had been it would take too long to construct it. That project was out of the question.

But while he stood there upon the banks of the deep ravine the undergrowth parted nearby and a man of most remarkable appearance stepped out.

In an instant a guard had a bayonet at his breast. But he threw up his hands and cried:

"All right, comrades! I surrender!"

But Will, with an exclamation, started forward. His face lit up with pleasure.

"Sim Ford!" he cried, "I am glad to see you. We are in luck!"

"Oh, it's Will Prentiss."

A tall, angular man of the mountaineer pattern, with a suit of half buckskin and half jeans, stood before the boy captain.

He had a shrewd fox-like face. His step was soft and cat-like and his manner alert and elusive.

Sim Ford was one of the most noted of the Confederate scouts. He was high in the confidence of General Beauregard and had accomplished many a shrewd and dangerous mission.

Will shook hands warmly with the scout, who looked at him with questioning surprise.

"But how is this?" he asked. "How did you get here? Who sent you here?"

"We are under orders from General Beauregard," said Will. "That is why we are here."

Sim Ford's queer little eyes opened wide.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "Beauregard sent you here?"

"Yes!"

"Well," said the scout with a shrug, "it must have been by some strange misunderstanding. Do you know where you are at this moment?"

"We are not far from the Pleasant Valley turnpike," replied Will. "We hope to reach that point before dark, where we are to establish ourselves and hold the road."

Sim Ford bit at a huge piece of tobacco.

He jerked his thumb at a distant rise of land.

"Do you see that ridge?"

"Yes!"

"Well, just beyond it is a regiment of Union infantry. Over yonder in those woods are two regiments and a battery. This stream above here is patrolled by Union cavalry. Why you have not been discovered before this is a miracle. Why, you are this moment in an angle of the Union line. If it should converge suddenly you would be surrounded."

Will was thunderstruck.

He could hardly believe Ford. They had boldly marched into what seemed almost certain to prove a trap. For a moment he was aghast.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"On Beaver Run, four miles from the point on the Pleasant Valley pike where you expected to make camp. In other words, you have marched several miles out of your way and nearer the enemy's line."

Fred Randolph, coming up at this moment, heard this. He was a trifle pale and said:

"Mr. Ford is right, Will. We took the wrong lane when we left the highway. We are in great danger. One of our skirmishers has just come in and says he has seen blue uniforms in the woods just below here. It is necessary for us to move out of this place at once."

"Recall the squad!" cried Will. "We will try to march back to the point where we left the highway. Our only hope is to draw carefully out of this trap, and——"

"Too late!" cried Ford suddenly. "Look over there!"

Just across the run the woods became suddenly alive with blue uniforms. A ringing cheer went up. The boys in Gray were discovered.

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE TRAP.

With that cheer came the cracking of muskets and bullets began to whistle over the bluff. Quick as possible Will gave the order to form.

His men fired a few shots in answer to those of the Union soldiers. Then they fell back steadily, for Ford had agreed that Will's plan was the best under the circumstances.

But, even as they came in sight of the highway, a wild cheer went up on the air and over a rail fence not two hundred yards away surged a blue line with bayonets fixed.

It was a desperate position in which the Grays found themselves. Will was half inclined to believe that his little company was doomed.

With a less cool nerve and stout heart he would have succumbed to a feeling of utter hopelessness. But Will Prentiss was not of that sort.

Instantly he gave the order for open formation in line of defense. Fire was opened upon the advancing line.

The line of blue wavered. Another volley caused it to waver still more and fall back. Behind the rail fence it formed and the miniature battle was on.

Sim Ford, the scout, was beside Will and tendered his advice.

"You are in a bad place, Prentiss. I think if I were you I would deploy to the left a little and then make a charge to try and turn their right. If you can get behind that corner of the fence you can roll them up on a double-quick charge."

Will saw that there was logic in the scout's words. He pondered the chance critically and then gave the order.

The Grays deployed quickly to the left. The move was seen by the Union captain, but not in time to avert it.

Before the Union troops could charge in front the Grays, with a wild cheer, came down upon their flank and began to roll them up irresistibly.

In vain the Union line tried to reform.

The Grays gave them no time. They went down through their midst like a thunderbolt.

Many prisoners could have been taken. But Will did not attempt it, for he knew he could do nothing with them.

So he led his company to an effectual repulse of the foe. Then, as the way was cleared along the bank of the run southward, he kept on rapidly in that direction.

But drums and signal guns were heard on the other side of the run and beyond the distant ridge. It was evident that the foe were alarmed, and in a short while the locality would be untenable.

The only chance for the Grays was to retreat rapidly southward. Sim Ford, who knew every inch of the locality, led the way.

For a while they met with no serious obstacle. A few skirmishers were driven back before them.

But the air was full of trouble. On all sides its sounds could be heard.

"There's one thing will save you!" cried Ford. "And that is darkness. If you can keep out of their clutches until nightfall I can bring you through all right."

"Let us pray that we can hold off until then," said Will, heartily. "Hello! What is this?"

A new and startling incident now happened. There was a fierce, stern hail from the woods nearby:

"Halt! Surrender, you graybacks, or it's all up with you!"

In an instant Will's ringing command went up:

"Down, Grays! Get to cover!"

Down upon the ground in the protection of stumps and underbrush sank the Grays. They were not a moment too soon.

Over their heads whistled the bullets of the unseen foe. Sim Ford was astonished. He had no idea that the Union troops were in such proximity.

Of course, the Grays answered the fire. For a few moments things were lively. The air was full of flying bullets. Blue smoke filtered upward through the foliage, for they were in the edge of the forest.

For a time the contest was hot. Four of the Grays lost

their lives. Once again Will was confronted with the stern belief that his little company was doomed.

But again Sim Ford came to the rescue. The scout made his way through the underbrush to the right a quarter of a mile to the run.

Here he found an easy ascent and below the water was shallow enough to allow of fording. At once the scout returned and brought the news to Will.

"I think it would pay to leave a thin line here to keep up the fire," he said. "They can fall back quick enough after we have crossed the run."

"But we have seen the foe on that side of the run," declared Will. "Will we not be jumping from the frying pan into the fire?"

"We can hardly make our position any worse," said the scout.

"That is true."

So the boy captain of the Grays proceeded to accept and follow the advice of the scout. In a few moments the majority of the Grays were on their way to the ford.

As quickly as possible they descended to the water's edge and waded the stream, which was only waist deep. Once on the other side they climbed the bluff, and for the first time felt a sense of safety.

The thin line of skirmishers left behind were now being driven back. The boys on the bluff, however, were able to protect their crossing by keeping a hot fire on the opposite bluff.

In this way the whole company were able to get across the run without any serious loss.

It was indeed a great relief to Will Prentiss, and hope once again revived in his breast. They were now able to hold the foe at bay, with the run between them.

But they did not forget that Union soldiers had been seen on that same side of the ravine. Will threw out a line of skirmishers to the north.

With the long day's march and the hot fighting in the bush of the past few hours the boys were pretty well exhausted.

Will would now gladly have made camp for the night. But to do so was as yet utterly out of the question.

The shadows of evening were at hand. Every moment objects were becoming less distinct across the ravine.

Little could be seen of the Union forces on the other side, but an increase of the volume of firing was evidence that they were increasing in force.

Sim Ford, the scout, now came forward.

"It's too bad, captain," he said. "You have lost your baggage all right. You might as well lose something else. It is possible that under the cover of darkness I can get you out of this scrape, but you'll have to leave your blankets and all but light equipments. I am going to take you through a swamp road west of here. Beyond is the Beaver range of hills. I think when we get there we can give the enemy the slip for good and all."

"Very good, Ford," said Will. "I am willing to accept your advice. Certainly it will be fatal for us to stay here."

"I think so, captain! The enemy are too much in force. If you wish I will undertake to show you the path now."

"Very good! I will give the order to fall back in light marching column."

Will gave the order to Lieutenant Randolph, and at once the Grays began to fall back. They quickly formed in marching column.

Sim Ford led the way into the tangled scrub. Through ravines and over ridges they now rapidly marched.

Their move was not suspected in time for the foe to make a lively pursuit. When the Grays' move was discovered it was by far too late.

The Virginia boys had slipped out of the lion's jaws. It was all due to the clever strategy and foresight of Sim Ford, the old scout.

For hours the boys marched and struggled on through the scrub. It was past ten o'clock when they entered the swamp road. Through this they marched until midnight.

Then they emerged and climbed an eminence. Beyond was open country.

The moon was just rising and shed a silver radiance over the landscape. Far away to the north were stars of light. They marked the camp fires of the Union line.

Sim Ford rubbed his hands with delight.

"We've pulled out of the nasty mess, boys," he cried. "For the present we are safe."

The Grays felt like cheering. But they knew the risk of this, so they refrained. They had no tents or camp equipment, but the night was fairly warm and they first partook of their rations and then cast themselves down and slept upon their arms.

But sleep did not come to Will Prentiss. The young captain had far too heavy a responsibility upon him.

He walked about the camp and watched the distant camp fires. Not until nearly morning did he venture to lie down for a brief rest.

With the break of day the Grays were astir. Will and Fred, with their field glasses, studied the country beyond.

Far away in the distance could be seen the housetops of a town. A highway led down through a cut in the hills.

Will knew at once that this road was the one spoken of by Beauregard in his order and the point he was expected to hold. Suddenly Fred gave a sharp cry of delight.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Look yonder, Will, on a line with the highway. Do you see that flag? It is a regimental banner, the colors of our regiment, and there are the headquarters of Colonel Joe English."

At this Will gave a cry of delight.

"You are right, Fred! We are all right. We shall soon be safe within our own lines."

When the Virginia Grays saw the colors of their colonel they gave a great cheer. There was now no longer need of caution.

If the foe were to attack them at this point, in a very few moments reinforcements would be on hand.

The Grays were nominally a part of the Virginia Regiment of Colonel Joe English. But by special orders of the

Confederate Congress they enjoyed privileges and a freedom of movement not usually accorded other companies.

It did not take long for the Grays to fall in for the march across the country to their designated post of duty. This was the cut in the hills through which the highway extended.

But Will knew that it was proper and in good taste to report first to Colonel English. So he marched straight for the colors. The Confederate flag was now seen just to the right.

The little company of Grays marched straight across the country. Of course, there was no regularity of step or line, for the country was too rough.

They were obliged to leap ditches, climb rail fences and push through underbrush. But finally they met with the hail:

"Halt! Who goes there!"

"Friends!" cried Will, who was in advance.

The sentinel, seeing that there was a large body of men before him, despite the fact that they were in gray uniform, fired his gun to call out the guard.

They responded quickly. Will called a halt and waited. A puffy little corporal came steaming up and asked:

"Have you the countersign?"

"We are the Virginia Grays, and I am Captain Will Prentiss. We belong to your regiment."

The corporal looked sharply at Will and then cried:

"Why, yes, of course! But I cannot allow you to pass the line. I will report to our colonel!"

The corporal vanished. It was not long, however, before he returned, saying:

"Colonel English orders that you march into camp and report to him!"

The picket guard saluted and the little company marched into the camp. As they were recognized by the other companies they were loudly cheered.

The Grays were allowed to stack their muskets and rest, while Will and Fred reported to Colonel English.

The colonel, a genial and able officer, met them with a hearty hand-shake.

"Indeed, I am glad to see you," he said. "Although you are detached from the regiment so much by special orders, I am proud always to feel that your company is a part of my command!"

"And we are proud to know Colonel English as our commander," said Will with a bow.

"I understand that you are at present acting under orders from General Beauregard?"

"Yes!"

"He has informed me of that fact and I have been on the lookout for you. I believe the post assigned to you is a very important one. It is to hold the cut in the Beaver Hills. It is feared that McClellan intends to seize that highway, which would place our left in danger."

Will's cheeks burned.

He felt the responsibility placed upon him as an honor. He bowed and said:

"The Virginia Grays will do their duty."

"Of that I feel assured," said Colonel English, "but why are you so late? I looked for you on the other side of the camp!"

"I can explain that," said Will. "You see, we got off our road, and it was only by the greatest of good fortune that we are here at all."

"Indeed!"

"We owe our extrication from a perilous trap to Sim Ford!"

"Sim Ford?" exclaimed Colonel English. "I would like much to see him. Is he with you at present?"

Will looked at Fred.

"Sim took his leave of us in the night," said the young lieutenant. "I have not seen him since."

CHAPTER III.

LIEUTENANT GRAY.

Colonel English seemed much disappointed. It was true that the old scout had mysteriously disappeared soon after camp was made the previous night.

Will had not been surprised, for this conduct was known to be quite in keeping with the eccentric scout's character.

"Well," said Colonel English, "it cannot be helped. I suppose he will turn up in due time. Now, captain, what is there I can do for you?"

"You can do much if it is in your power. We have lost our camp equipage, tents and all. Can you procure us more?"

"I think I can," said the colonel readily. "A supply train arrived to-day. We have more tents than we need."

"I am glad to hear that," said Will. "My boys will greatly appreciate it."

"I will see that you are supplied at once," said Colonel English. "By the way, I saw your father a few days since."

Will's face lit up with joy.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "I trust he was in good health!"

"Yes, in very excellent health. Also I hear that Miss Nellie has received special commendation from the Congress for clever work in Washington as a spy."

Will's face glowed.

He was very proud of his sister Nell, one of the most beautiful girls in all Virginia, and as brave as she was beautiful.

She had not been content to remain at home while her countrymen were enlisting for the war.

She chose to aid her people by clever work as a secret service agent or spy. Owing to her high connections in Washington, she was able to render invaluable service to the Confederate cause.

"All this is pleasant news for me, Colonel English," said Will. "I will now go back to my company. I shall be ready to march to our post of duty as soon as I have orders from you."

It was noon, however, before the Grays received their new

camp equipment and were given the order to march. They fell in and soon had left the headquarters camp.

Within an hour they were posted in the Beaver Cut. Their position commanded the highway leading toward Germantown.

The new camp equipments were at once made use of. It seemed good to once more have tents and blankets to use at night.

Will Prentiss at once began to study his position with an eye to the best possible defense in case of attack.

And attack was sure to come.

The Beaver Cut was a position akin almost to that of the Pass of Thermopylæ. A small body of men might hold at bay a tremendous force.

And General Beauregard knew this and had chosen the Grays for the post, which he knew they would hold with their lines.

Will quickly set at work digging intrenchments. He selected the most strategical points for defense and proceeded to make them as nearly invulnerable as possible.

A long line of trenches commanded the road to the east. A transverse line was constructed to guard against an enfilading fire.

Beyond this first line of trenches were three other lines so connected that the boys, if hard pressed, could fall back into them and still hold the foe in check.

All this accomplished, the routine of life in intrenchments was begun. Supplies were stored in the stronghold and Will would have given much for a field piece or two.

But, even as it was, he felt quite secure. He believed that he could hold a large force at bay.

"I don't believe they will want to give us a hard fight," said Fred. "I tell you, Will, only the very strongest force could turn us out of this!"

"I believe you!" agreed Will, "but, for all that, we must make ourselves as secure as possible."

"Of course, in case of a hard battle, we would be reinforced by Colonel English."

"Certainly!"

So the two young officers reasoned. But they had little idea as to how matters were to take a turn.

That night the Grays slept in their new camp. The next morning at an early hour Will was astir, when he heard the pickets challenge and saw a couple of horsemen in the highway below.

In a moment Will started for the guard line. He heard the conversation between the picket and the visitors.

"We are attached to General Beauregard's staff. We wish to see Captain Prentiss. We have not the countersign. Call out the guard!"

The picket was about to do this, when Will called out:

"All right, Severance. I will see the gentlemen. Let them come up!"

The picket saluted, and the two horsemen rode in. One was a man of commanding presence, wearing a colonel's uniform. The other was a younger man, a lieutenant.

The moment Will set eyes upon the first named he gave a shout of joy:

"Father!"

Colonel Prentiss dropped from his saddle and clasped his beloved son in his arms. It was a happy meeting.

"Well, my boy," said Colonel Prentiss, "I have heard many favorable accounts of you that have made me proud of you."

"I have tried to do my duty," replied Will, modestly. "I have some brave boys with me, father. It is to them I owe all."

"Well, my boy, I can remain with you but a short while. General Beauregard has instructed me to warn all officers of this line that a heavy attack by General Ward, of the Union forces, may be expected to-day. Every officer must be ready, for there will doubtless be heavy fighting."

Will bowed quietly.

"All right, father!" he said. "We are ready. We have done all we can."

"I am glad to know that. I shall pray for you, my son."

They embraced, and then Colonel Prentiss, as if the thought had suddenly struck him, turned and said:

"But, pardon me! I have the honor to introduce to you Lieutenant Gray, of General Johnston's staff. He is riding with me to-day by courtesy of General Beauregard."

Will looked Lieutenant Gray fairly in the eye, and for a moment there was silence. They clasped hands.

Will's hand was warm and sympathetic. But the hand of Lieutenant Gray was cold and clammy.

"I am pleased to meet your son, Colonel Prentiss," said Gray in a perfunctory way, and then looked over Will's head.

In an instant a settled aversion to the fellow was created in Will's mind.

He turned away and called loudly:

"Scipio, you black rascal! Where are you?"

In an instant the comical little black, who was Will's body servant, came out of his tent.

"All right, massa! I'se heah, sah!"

"Scipio, get a good warm breakfast ready for my guests. Do your best, now."

"All right, sah!"

"No, no, Will!" protested Colonel Prentiss. "We would like to partake of your hospitality, but I fear we must not tarry."

"But I insist, father. If you have a commission to notify other commands beyond this, I will send one of my trusty men to execute it for you."

Lieutenant Gray's eyes had flashed at the proposition. He at once alighted.

"I don't know what you think of it, Colonel Prentiss," he said, "but I am going to accept this invitation. I bear in mind the fact that I haven't had a square meal for a week."

Colonel Prentiss at this made no further objection. He dismounted and Will led the way to his tent.

While Will and his father were engaged in conversation, Lieutenant Gray occupied himself in walking about the intrenchments and inspecting the camp.

In the course of the conversation with his father, Will asked:

"By the way, who is this Lieutenant Gray? May I ask?"

"Certainly!" replied Colonel Prentiss. "Personally I know little about him. He brought letters from General Johnston to General Beauregard and asked permission to accompany me on my ride along the line."

Will thought no more upon the subject. This seemed to explain everything concerning the lieutenant.

It might never have entered his mind again but for a peculiar line of questioning indulged in by Lieutenant Gray during the meal.

"Captain," he asked as he sipped his coffee, "I suppose you consider yourself strongly intrenched here?"

"Well, yes, I think so," replied Will. "We can hold quite a respectable force at bay."

"You are not proof against artillery."

"No, that is true!"

"Another point: How would you send for reinforcements if hard pressed? There is a wide gap between your position and that of Colonel English."

Will was surprised.

"That gap would be instantly filled by Colonel English if we were attacked," he replied.

Lieutenant Gray raised his eyebrows and was silent for a time. But the persistence of his questioning and the character of the questions made a strange impression on Will's mind.

After the meal was over, Colonel Prentiss and Lieutenant Gray rode away. As the lieutenant shook hands in parting with Will there was a curious snaky gleam in his eyes, and he said in a purring way:

"Many thanks for your hospitality, captain. We may meet again—soon!"

Will made no reply, but the fellow's words rang in his ears with a curious significance. He turned to meet the questioning gaze of Fred Randolph.

"Well?" stammered Fred.

"Well?" repeated Will.

"Did you really like the looks of that fellow, Will?"

"No!"

The two gripped hands.

"He may be a friend to the Confederacy, but, if so, his friendship subserves some personal end."

"That is true!"

"Joe Spotswood told me that he went all through the trenches and made all manner of queer inquiries. Joe said he even saw him writing down something in a notebook."

Will gave a start.

A sudden thrilling suspicion dawned upon him. Could it be that Gray was a traitor? But he recalled the fact that he had come with letters from General Johnston.

So Will only shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the fellow from his mind.

So General Beauregard was assured that an attack on that part of the line was imminent. Will felt quite secure, for he knew that all possible had been done to prepare for the attack.

As the day wore on, though, and no sign of the enemy appeared, he began to feel as if it might be possible after all that there might be a mistake.

But suddenly, as the middle of the afternoon was reached, Will spied with his glass far in the distance down the highway a cloud of dust.

And soon out of that dust cloud there appeared the gleam of bayonets and the columns of blue marching on to the attack.

It was a thrilling sight.

Only those who have witnessed the like and been in the position of Will Prentiss can fully appreciate it. The thrill which seized upon the young captain at that moment was a wild one.

In a short while those lines of blue would be deployed in front of the intrenchments. They would soon be advancing to the attack.

Then would follow the wild and awful scenes of carnage incident to battle. Many a brave soul in that marching column would yield up his life on that hillside.

Will watched the oncoming foe with a strange fascination. He had looked to see that every man was at his post. Everything was ready for the defence.

Suddenly he gave a start.

Up the highway into the cut came a single horseman. In an instant Will recognized him as his father.

Colonel Prentiss, who had the countersign, passed the picket guard and came up to the spot where Will stood.

His face was a trifle pale and his manner anxious.

"Father!" cried Will, springing forward, "I am glad you have returned!"

"I cannot linger," said Colonel Prentiss. "I must return as soon as possible to apprise General Beauregard of the state of affairs up here."

"The enemy is coming!"

"Yes! I understand they are five or six thousand strong. There are only about three full regiments along this part of the line to withstand them. I think reinforcements would be the safer course."

"Still the military rule is that three to one are required to storm a breastwork."

"Very true!" agreed Colonel Prentiss. "I certainly hope they will be repulsed. But another matter worries me."

"What is it?"

"Lieutenant Gray has mysteriously disappeared. Some distance down the cut his horse became unmanageable, and he could not control it. The animal carried him away around a bend in the road. He did not return. I could find no trace of him, and I fear the worst."

Will was startled and pale.

"What do you mean by the worst, father?"

"Why, the possibility that he may have fallen into the hands of guerrillas, or even the Federals themselves."

Will was stiff and constrained as he put a hand on his father's shoulder.

"This lieutenant Gray, father, do you know much about him? I cannot say just why, but I distrust him!"

"Distrust him!"

Colonel Prentiss gave a start. He looked at Will in surprise.

"Why, he is one of General Johnston's most trusted men. I think your suspicion is an ill-founded one."

"But—if that breaking away of his horse was a subterfuge—if he was really a traitor and a spy——"

Father and son looked at each other. But Colonel Prentiss shook his head.

"It is not likely, my son," he said. "Dismiss that thought from your mind. But, see! the line of blue grows stronger. I must go on to headquarters at once."

Will embraced his father again and Colonel Prentiss rode away. The young captain's face grew rigid and hard, as once again he thought of Gray.

"He may be all right!" he muttered. "But——"

He paused and his keen gaze caught a faint moving speck in the roadway, certainly miles away. He fixed his glass upon it.

It was a horse and rider going straight for the Union line. But Will could not at that distance tell if it was Gray or not. He closed his glass and went grimly back to his tent.

Twenty minutes later when he reappeared he was given a surprise.

The line of blue was no longer in sight. The highway was clear as far as the eye could reach.

Will was puzzled. He knew that word must have reached the Federals that an ambush was awaiting them. Instead of advancing by the road they had diverged.

The young captain was now convinced that there was something wrong.

"There is treachery somewhere," he muttered. "Oh, if I was only sure!"

However, he could only wait and watch. It seemed an age before any further developments occurred.

Then, suddenly rattling volleys were heard far to the right. Fred Randolph came rushing in and cried:

"The fight is on, Will. They have attacked the right wing of Colonel English's force."

"The right wing!" exclaimed Will. Then he thought of Gray.

CHAPTER IV.

FORCED TO RETREAT.

The young captain of the Grays could not help but associate Gray with this method of attack by the Federals, for he remembered his argument with the young lieutenant upon the feasibility of such an attack.

But, however, the battle was on. The air was filled with rattling volleys of musketry.

Heavy clouds of smoke floated skyward, revealing the line of fire on both sides. Then through his glass Will saw the bayonet charges of the Federals.

He saw with a gasp of horror that the first line of Colonel English's force was already driven in.

The weight of superior numbers, coupled with unparalleled valor, had carried them over the first line of intrenchments.

The Confederates fought like demons. But the blue line was certainly sweeping them back.

"My soul! It seems as if we ought to go to their aid, Will!" cried Fred Randolph. "Colonel English will surely be wiped out!"

Will's face was hard and set.

"Do you note a certain fact?"

"What?"

"The foe knew the ground. They attack at the vulnerable points. They make no mistake. Do you note that?"

"Yes!"

"There you are!" said the boy captain, with clouded face. "There is no doubt in my mind that the foe had full information before the battle."

"Who could have given it to them?"

The two young officers exchanged glances.

"It is not difficult to understand," said Will. "I guess that Lieutenant Gray could answer that question."

"I am of your opinion also," said Fred. "I didn't like the looks of the chap."

But now the boys became aware of a startling fact.

Colonel English's line was being driven in. All connection between them was being cut. In a few hours at least the little company of Grays would be isolated.

It was plain that they would be attacked next and a desperate fight for existence must result.

But just then Will was approached by a soldier, who saluted:

"If you please, sir, the picket sends word to you that a man whom you know well is anxious to pass the lines!"

"Bring him here!" said Will. He was convinced that a visitor at this hour must bring some word of good import.

He was astounded, however, beyond all belief when he saw the guard returning with the visitor. He was Lieutenant Gray.

The lieutenant presented a wild appearance.

His uniform was soiled and torn, his face and hands scratched and his sword was broken. He approached Will with a distressed expression upon his face.

"I am in bad luck, comrade," he said. "My horse threw me into a ravine. I laid there helpless for hours. Where is your father?"

The fellow's appearance and his words completely disarmed Will. It seemed as if he had certainly misjudged him, after all.

"I am sorry, Lieutenant Gray," he said. "My father has gone on down the line. I don't think it will be safe just now for you to venture on."

"Oh, no!" said Gray readily. "I can see that the foe have attacked English. Do you apprehend that they will come here next?"

"It is likely," said Will. "The very exigency of which you spoke has occurred."

The lieutenant's face was a study.

"What?" he asked.

"That they would strike first between me and English, and so prevent reinforcements being sent."

"That was my theory."

"Well, it seems as if it had come true," said Will. "I consider our situation desperate, lieutenant, unless General Beauregard makes a quick move."

"I hope he will do so. I have no desire to become a prisoner of war."

"Nor I," agreed Will, "but I suppose you will remain with us, lieutenant?"

"I have no alternative. I trust you will not consider me as imposing upon your hospitality."

"By no means."

It was now seen that English had been forced from his intrenchments and driven back more than a quarter of a mile into thick oak scrub.

Here he held on doggedly. The Union line had passed by the cut and was now on three sides of the position held by the Grays.

There would still have been a chance for them to escape by falling back instantly. But Will was not disposed to do this.

He had been commissioned by General Beauregard to hold the cut and he was bound to do so at any cost.

So he gave no order for retreat. Instead he watched the battle.

But now it was seen that a Union column had diverged and was coming straight for the eminence. The Grays at once got ready to repel the attack.

Nearer came the blue line. Will withheld the fire until the Union soldiers were almost up to the breastworks.

Then he shouted:

"At them, Grays—Fire!"

A heavy volley was poured into the attacking line. It wavered and then began to gather force. But a second volley disorganized it.

The brave soldiers in blue fell back and formed again only when a spot of safety had been reached. The Virginia Grays sent up a wild cheer of victory.

The words of the Union colonel could be plainly heard:

"It's a tough climb to get at 'em, boys. But we must have them. Rally boys, rally!"

With a wild, inspiring cheer, the Boys in Blue came on again. But once more the terrible volleys shattered their lines, and they were hurled back.

It was then that their colonel probably decided that the breastworks could not be carried by any small force. So he fell back to wait for reinforcements.

There was a lull in the battle.

It was then that Lieutenant Gray came excitedly up to Will.

"This is our time, captain," he cried. "We can get out now safely!"

"Get out safely!" exclaimed Will. "What do you mean?"

"Why, retreat, of course. Do you not contemplate such a thing?"

"Never!" cried Will. "I hope you will not accuse me of being a coward."

"By no means," said Gray hastily. "But look yonder!"

Will glanced to the highway again. He saw that which gave him a chill.

Horses in troops with lumbering caissons and heavy gun carriages trailing behind. The Union artillery was swinging into position to open fire upon them.

Will knew what that meant.

He knew that their intrenchments were of no avail against the deadly shells which would be hurled into them. They could hold out indefinitely against repeated charges of infantry.

But the artillery could keep beyond their reach and annihilate them. The boy captain was in a deadly quandary.

What could be done?

He looked anxiously toward the line of Colonel English's position. He saw that it was useless to hope for aid from that source.

The brave colonel's force had been driven far back, thus bending in the main Confederate line almost to a bursting point.

"The day is lost!" groaned Fred Randolph. "We must either surrender or be killed like sheep in a pen."

Will walked nervously up and down.

Where was Beauregard's promised aid? Where were the reinforcements? Surely he must know that the battle was on.

Lieutenant Gray, politely cool and almost sardonic, stood by as if awaiting Will's decision.

"No!" said the boy captain. "The day is not lost, Fred. If we must retreat, we will leave nothing behind to the advantage of the foe."

"Now you are coming to a sensible conclusion," said Gray. "A retreat is your only hope."

Will turned and fixed a keen, critical gaze upon the lieutenant.

"It is very odd, in fact it is quite beyond my comprehension, how General Ward knew our vulnerable point. Somewhere in our camp there is a traitor!"

Not a line of Gray's face quivered.

He returned Will's gaze coolly. Then taking a step nearer, he said:

"I trust that your words convey no insinuation against me, sir. I am a member of General Johnston's staff, and I am attached on special service for the best interests of the cause. All suspicions against me are wholly misplaced."

Will was for a moment nonplussed. This straightforward intimation showed him that Gray had read his mind.

"I should be sorry to discover that you were a spy, Lieutenant Gray," he said. "I would by no means make the charge. But if I were to discover the fact, I would see that you were dealt with accordingly."

There was a note of menace in Gray's voice as he replied:

"When you discover the fact, it will be full time for you to act. I believe all men honest until I know them to be otherwise."

Will bowed coldly.

"The matter is not a pleasant one for discussion," he said. "You and I cannot seem to meet on terms of friendliness. We will at least not declare enmity until after the war is over. For the present, as we are both fighting for the Confederacy, let us be friends."

And Will, with a smile, held out his hand in a frank and honest way. Gray looked at him searchingly and took it.

"You will live to learn that your suspicions against me are unfounded," he said. "I am seeking promotion and honor that I may win the hand of the fairest young woman in Virginia."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Will, with a start. "May I ask who she is?"

"Miss Emily Fairleigh, of Fairleigh Hall."

The boy captain gave a great start.

"One of my sister Nell's school friends," he cried. "Sir, if you are fortunate enough to hold her heart, it is sufficient proof of your loyalty. For Emily Fairleigh is true as steel."

"I am the fortunate man," said Gray, with dignity. "I love her with all my soul."

In that moment Will felt heartily ashamed of his suspicions. He hastened to make amends.

"I wish you joy, Gray," he said. "I trust you will forget the past few hours. In these days of doubt and uncertainty one hardly knows whom to trust."

"You are right," said Gray, heartily. "But, see! We are going to get their shells in a very few minutes."

Even as he spoke there was a distant boom and a cannon ball went flying over their heads.

Also, at the same moment, a converging line of blue was seen coming from the direction of the position once held by English.

Now that the Confederates had been driven in that quarter, it was plain that the Union forces were to turn and capture the breastworks which commanded the cut.

Will Prentiss was brave, but not reckless. He saw at once that the day was lost. In the face of this conviction there was but one sensible move to make.

It was a move which he disliked to make. To retreat, however, in the face of a superior foe is not disgrace.

So the young captain gave the order.

Reluctantly, but in good order, the Grays picked up their effects and began to fall back out of their intrenchments. It was none too soon.

For Will saw that the Union infantry was deploying to get in their rear.

Will's thought was to fall back to the banks of a creek two miles away. Then he would swing about and try to come up in support of Colonel English's hard-pressed column.

But Lieutenant Gray said:

"You will be cut off. Sufficient time will not be allowed you. It is wiser and better for you to save yourself. I think I can help you to do that."

"Oh! How is that?" asked Will.

"I am familiar with this region. As a boy I hunted foxes all through here. Just three miles to the northwest

is the old turnpike to Pleasant Valley. I know that the Union supply train will pass through there to-morrow. It will be a bold and telling stroke to fall upon and capture it."

The plan dazzled Will.

He could see that it was wholly feasible and that it would reflect great credit upon his command should he succeed. The temptation was great.

Fred Randolph was called into consultation. The young lieutenant was at once captivated by the scheme.

"Nothing could be better," he cried. "Let us at once adopt the scheme. If we can make a move like that and cut their supplies off it will do more toward checking their advance than anything else."

"Lieutenant Randolph is right," said Gray. "It may be the saving of English."

Will could not help but see the logic of the plan. He fell into it at once.

"It is done," he cried. "Lieutenant Gray, as you are so familiar with this region, I shall leave it to you what course we shall take."

"I will gladly act as guide," agreed Gray. "By this time to-morrow we shall have dealt the Union Army a blow which they will most sorely feel."

The Virginia Grays quickly fell into line and the march began.

They left their intrenchments, and, crossing the highway on the other side of the cut, they swung into a disused woods road. They little dreamed to what they were marching.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE PLANTATION HOUSE.

Lieutenant Gray seemed to know the region well.

With great skill he led the Grays through the wild region, across ravines, over hillsides and forded streams. The thunder of the enemy's guns was heard for a time.

Then it died out, and the Grays knew that beyond a doubt they had entered the intrenchments and found their enemy had given them the slip.

"They may try pursuit," said Gray. "But they can never catch us. I know places in these wilds where we could hide from them forever."

The spirits of the Grays were none too high. Retreat is not conducive to high spirits.

But they said nothing and plodded cheerfully on. The day was rapidly drawing to a close.

"This journey will bring to me much joy," said Gray, as he walked beside Will, "for a certain cogent reason."

"Ah!" exclaimed Will. "What can that be?"

"In another hour we shall come out between those hills to the plantation of Matthew Cotton. At the present moment the girl of my heart, fair Emily Fairleigh, is visiting her Cousin Julia there."

Will gave a start.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "A matter of pure coincidence, I suppose."

"Absolutely! I would as quickly have led you in any other direction."

"Of course! Well, lieutenant, I cannot blame you. I would like very much to see Miss Fairleigh myself. Oh, you need have no fear or jealousy. I am heart and fancy free."

Gray laughed in a peculiar way.

"In many ways I am a lucky dog," he said. "I am fortunate in having her love. But I am unfortunate in the fact that I am poor in the goods of this world."

"If I know Emily Fairleigh aright such an obstacle as that will not annul her regard for you."

"Very likely! I could not, though, think of bringing her down to poverty. She was reared in affluence, and I have also fastidious tastes. The thought makes me very miserable."

Will looked at Gray curiously.

"Frankly, I must say that you have not the proper spirit," he said. "In this great country a man need not remain poor if he exerts himself."

"That is all very well!" drawled Gray. "But I was not trained for a mercantile life. I do not think I could stoop to trade. I was born a gentleman."

He raised his head haughtily as he spoke. Will did not speak his mind further. But he sized Gray up in his own way.

"Still, the poor man with a proper spirit is happier than the rich man with many millions," he said.

"Humph!" said Gray. "It would require a more philosophical spirit than I can conjure up to remain here in America grubbing a living at the desk or on a plantation. I simply pine for the gay capitals of Europe, life on the Riviera or a winter in Algiers. I cannot help it. My tastes are fastidious and they must be gratified before I die."

He clicked his teeth together and a strange, hard light came into his eyes, which Will had noted once before, and which gave him again that feeling of instinctive distrust.

But the little company of Grays had now reached the point between the hills selected as a desirable spot to camp by Gray.

Just beyond was the Pleasant Valley road, by which, as Gray declared, the commissary and supply train of the Union Army must pass on the following day.

Camp was quickly made.

A screen of small trees shut the Grays out from the view of any one on the highway. Thus they really were in ambush.

Far below could be seen the twinkling lights of Matthew Cotton's plantation.

In all that part of Virginia he was known as a representative man. In the Confederate Congress he was a power.

Julia Cotton was a popular belle in the younger Richmond set, for Matthew Cotton had a winter home in that city.

When darkness had shut down, and after the camp was quiet, Gray walked into Will's tent.

"By your leave, captain," he said, "I am going down to the Cottons' to spend the evening. This afternoon you spoke of a desire to go with me."

"Yes!" said Will, arising. "It will be a great pleasure."

So the two officers set out. They went down to the highway and diverged into a road which led over to the plantation.

The night was dark, for the moon had not yet arisen.

The great plantation house was full of life and light. As they approached they saw colored servants passing along the broad porch. Vines clung to the pillars and showed rich and luxuriant in the light from the low windows.

The notes of a piano were heard, with the wondrous rich voice of a woman. The two young officers paused and waited until the sweet notes died away.

"It is she," said Gray in a suppressed way.

Then they approached. On the porch sat a silver-haired old man of rugged features and heavy frame.

Matthew Cotton started up as he saw the gray uniforms. Then he shouted:

"Hello! It's Gray himself! Well, I'm glad to see you, my boy. Walk right up with your friend——"

"Captain Will Prentiss," said Gray.

"What! Not Jeff Prentiss' boy?"

"He is my father," said Will.

"Well, you are welcome to this house, young man. I have heard much about you and your Virginia Grays."

"And we are glad to see you, Mr. Cotton," said Gray. "I suppose Miss Julia is well?"

"Like a young filly!" cried the old planter. "Walk right in. You have come in right good time, for she has a guest whom you know well."

"Not Miss Fairleigh——"

"The same!" cried Matthew Cotton. "Here Cuffy, you old scoundrel! Why don't you attend to the gentlemen?"

A colored servant in semi-livery came forward obsequiously and took charge of the caps and cloaks of the young officers.

Then Will and the lieutenants walked into the drawing room.

"Here, Julia!" called the bluff old planter. "I have a surprise for you and your guest. This way!"

From the inner room came the two young girls. Julia gave a cry of surprise and joy and rushed forward to shake hands with the visitors.

It was a happy meeting between Gray and his sweetheart.

Then all sat down and there began a pleasant converse, which lasted for over an hour.

Gray was much devoted to his lady love. Will made himself quite agreeable to Miss Julia.

But after a time the planter came in with some rare old wine. In deference to his tastes, the conversation now turned upon the subject of the hour—the great civil strife.

"They tell me that Beauregard wanted to go right into Washington after Bull Run, but Davis wouldn't let him do it," said the planter.

"I think it a wise and cautious move on Davis' part," said Will.

Gray looked up quickly.

"If Beauregard's advice had been followed the Yankee Capital would be in our hands to-day."

"Eh?" sputtered Cotton. "Do you really believe that?"

"I know it!"

"Pardon me!" said Will, quickly. "But how do you know it?"

"From inside information, of which I became possessed," said Gray. Then color mounted to his temples. "I received my authority for the statement from a certain Confederate spy."

Will, however, affected not to notice Gray's change of manner. The old planter went on:

"Speaking of spies, what have they done with young Willis Ross, who sold some of our secrets to the Washington War Board?"

"He was hanged yesterday at Richmond," said Gray promptly.

Emily Fairleigh's eyes flashed.

"So die all traitors to the Confederacy," she said sharply.

Gray did not move. But a curious pallor came over his face, which Will did not fail to note.

It was a late hour when they left the plantation house. The hospitality of Matthew Cotton was proverbial.

"So it is a fact that the Yankees' commissary train is to pass this way to-morrow, and you are to capture it?" said Cotton, with kindling eyes. "Oh! What a pity that age prevents me from joining you in that little affair!"

"You will be a witness, Mr. Cotton," said Gray. "Is not that something?"

"Yes!" agreed the planter. "I hope you will do your duty."

"Be assured of that!"

As they walked back to the camp, Will turned with a sudden impulse and asked:

"I say, Gray, what if that commissary train did not come by this road?"

Gray shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you will feel that we have had this march for nothing," he said.

"Well, no, not exactly!"

"Have no fear. The train can go by no other road, for every other road is held by a large body of our troops."

When camp was reached Will cast himself down for a long sleep. He was tired and exhausted from the events of the last few days.

But he was up early, and the Grays turned out for the morning roll call. The company ranks had lost eleven men.

But a number of recruits had been picked up on the way, so that really the company was stronger than its full quota of boys would have been.

The position of the company was changed a little.

It was Will's theory that a part of the commissary train might escape by a side road a mile below. He decided to send Fred Randolph and forty men to that point.

To this plan Gray interposed every possible objection.

"A division of forces at any time is a mistake," he declared. "No good will come of it."

But Will adhered to his plan. There was nothing to do now but wait.

The hours passed tediously.

Finally, when the hour of noon arrived a cry went up from the guard in the road below. Will ran to a good point of observation.

He saw a train of wagons filing up the highway. He saw that the supreme moment had come.

As he believed, it was the commissary train of the Union forces. He believed that he was about to strike a blow that would cause the foe to retreat and spoil their plans for the present campaign.

For only the soldier of experience can know what it means to be without food or supplies in the enemy's country.

More armies have suffered defeat from this cause than any other. It was natural, therefore, that Will should feel elated.

But, even as he watched, a sudden chill seized upon him. Gray turned and said:

"It's all up, Prentiss. We're lost!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SURRENDER.

Will turned like a flash.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Gray smiled coldly and pointed to the south, or the direction from whence they had come. A squad of men in blue were seen coming from the woods.

"What can that mean?" said the young captain, for a moment befogged. "Is it some small detachment?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Gray. "Look yonder! I tell you we are lost!"

In the highway below a line of Union troops had suddenly appeared. Farther along the ridge others were seen.

In an instant Will unsheathed his sword. A terrible presentiment was upon him.

"We are trapped!" he cried. "Fall in, boys. We've got to get out in some way!"

The order went up and was carried along by the other officers. The Grays sprung to arms quickly. But a glance was enough to show them that it was useless to try to dispute the pass, for they were outnumbered ten to one.

The Union soldiers had already sighted them, and their cheering could be heard.

Retreat, of course, was the only thing that could be counted upon now. Will gave the order and the Grays fell back in good order.

The Union troops opened fire, and by Will's orders it was returned. In this way they kept on over the hill.

Will quickly formed his plan for escape.

At the foot of the hill was a deep run. On the other side was a steep ascent.

If he could gain this, he believed that he could swing around through the woods and rejoin Fred Randolph and his boys. With his full company, Will believed that he could make at least some kind of a stand.

But his plan was doomed to failure.

Just as he began the descent he saw a regimental flag on the other side of the ravine, and bullets came whistling up the slope.

The truth was apparent. They were absolutely surrounded.

What was to be done?

Will was not yet ready to surrender. There was always the chance of reinforcements. He was determined to hold out as long as he could.

Just half way down the hill was a small cabin. It afforded the only possible shelter for the moment.

Dick Walton, second lieutenant, cried:

"Shall we make a stand by the old cabin, captain? Every boy is ready to fight to the death!"

"Yes!" cried Will. "We will not surrender!"

So into the cabin the boys ran. Through the windows they kept up a hot fire on the distant foe.

Outside the cabin some of the boys remained. Several of them were stricken down by bullets, and the others rushed into the cabin.

The battle now became a hot one. The bullets flew like hail.

They riddled the walls of the cabin, one after another of the boys receiving painful wounds.

Joe Spotswood received a scalp wound and a bullet in the leg. Will seemed to bear a charmed life.

He was cool and steady and gave his orders in an even tone. He was at every window in turn and directed the firing.

The bullets perforated the walls of the old cabin, making of it a literal sieve.

Then suddenly, in front of the long Union line on the hill, there appeared a field piece.

"It's all up, boys!" said Gray, who was white to the lips. Gray had done little fighting. He was now lying flat on his stomach on the cabin floor.

His conduct strangely partook of what might almost be called cowardice.

When Will saw the field piece his heart sank. He knew that the end had come. Resistance was of no further use.

Boom! Crash!

A ball from the cannon ploughed through the upper story of the cabin. At once flame and smoke arose.

"We'll be burned up like rats in a trap," groaned Gray. "What's the use of holding out longer, Prentiss? We might as well give up!"

"Shut up, you poltroon!" cried one of the boys, angrily. "You're the worst coward I ever saw!"

Once again the field piece was trained. Will looked about him.

He saw that the cabin was in flames; that the dead and

dying lay about him. It smote his heart, and he decided to relinquish the struggle.

"It must be done!" he groaned.

He improvised a flag of truce. Then he flung open the cabin door.

It was hard to surrender. But Will Prentiss knew that it was necessary, as many of his brave boys were wounded.

So he stepped out with the flag of truce.

Firing ceased and an officer and guard marched down from the Union line. Dick Walton had stepped out behind Will.

In the doorway was Joe Spotswood supported by the others. The wounded sergeant craved fresh air.

The lieutenant from the Union line gave a salute and asked:

"I come in answer to your flag of truce, captain. Do you surrender?"

"What are your terms?"

"Unconditional surrender!"

"I cannot accept them. I demand that we be treated as prisoners of war and that the officers of my company be allowed to keep their side-arms."

"I will report to my colonel!"

The lieutenant saluted and went back to the Union line. It was some ten minutes before he was seen again returning.

"Colonel Bishop accepts your terms," he said. "Your men may march out and lay down their arms. They will be held as prisoners of war until General Ward arrives with his main army."

"Very good, sir!" said Will. "The terms are acceptable. I am certain that terms will soon be arranged for the exchange of myself and my officers."

The Grays marched out and laid down their arms. There were only forty of them. Forty more were somewhere down the turnpike in charge of Fred Randolph. The others were dead.

The boys were allowed to carry the wounded on litters and thus they marched over the hill with the Union regiments on either side.

With the drums beating, the prisoners were marched down the road. Then Will saw to his surprise that they had turned into the lane leading to the Cotton plantation.

"What does this mean?" he asked of the officer nearest him. "Is your regiment quartered here?"

"It is Colonel Bishop's headquarters," was the reply. "He will wait here for General Ward to arrive."

In a few moments they were in the great yard before the Cotton house. Will saw officers in blue striding the piazza and that Cotton's black slaves were hurrying about as if in their service.

On the upper piazza he saw the planter with his daughter and Miss Fairleigh. They looked decidedly glum.

And no wonder! For a man even as wealthy as Matthew Cotton to have a dozen Union officers quartered upon him was no light matter.

The Grays were marched to a field in the rear of the plantation house. Here tents were pitched for them and a circle of armed sentries placed about them.

Colonel Bishop, who was a fat, sleek-looking man, called Cotton into his presence.

"See here, my friend," he said; "these prisoners are countrymen of yours. I propose that you shall show your patriotism by feeding them."

So the boys were dependent upon what the planter was able to give them. And to his credit be it said, the planter did his best, even smuggling delicacies to them that the Union officers could not get.

Will and Lieutenant Gray were given the liberty of the house, as also was Dick Walton. They were not allowed, however, to carry their side-arms, though they might retain them.

All this seemed to be highly acceptable to Gray.

He was in the best of spirits and seemed to be exceedingly friendly with Bishop. He even played chess with him in his room at night.

Will, however, was uneasy and much depressed. It was a heavy blow to him to have to surrender.

He could see little before him now but an irksome wait until his exchange could be made. Perhaps this might not be made. The events of war move so irregularly that they cannot be depended upon.

But the young captain did not give up hope. He remembered that General Beauregard would not be idle. Perhaps there would be a rescue.

Colonel Bishop was an officer of good training but notoriously lax habits.

He was fond of a good dinner and of oversleeping. He was wont to entrust all matters not of the utmost importance to his junior officers.

What speedily developed also was the fact that he was fond of the society of women.

Julia Cotton and Emily Fairleigh were to him objects of deep admiration. He was particularly impressed with the beauty of Emily.

This was not at all to the taste of Lieutenant Gray. His jealousy was aroused.

Will, from his distance, saw the affair progress, and he could easily have predicted its culmination. There was bound to be trouble between the two officers.

Bishop seemed to have all the advantage, for Gray held the position of a prisoner. And now some startling revelations were in order.

A week passed and still Bishop's regiment held its post at Cotton's plantation.

Nothing was heard of the Confederates. It was reported that English had been driven far to the south.

Bishop, while waiting orders, lapsed into a life of luxurious ease and dissipation. He made Matthew Cotton produce his best wines. He dined the other officers and insisted upon Cotton and the young women as guests.

In fact, he played the part of an embryo despot. For a time things were critical at the plantation.

Then one day, as Will was walking in the garden back of the house, he heard some surprising conversation.

"I am going to propose to Miss Fairleigh, and she dare not refuse me. I tell you she dare not!"

The voice was that of Bishop.

"Well, on my honor as a Virginian, I tell you she will not marry you!"

The voice that uttered these words belonged to Matthew Cotton. Will looked through the shrubbery and saw the two men facing each other in the walk.

Both were earnest and angry. Bishop was insistent and confident.

"I say she will!"

"I say she will not!"

"What authority have you over her?"

"I am her friend and protector!"

"Bah! I can hang you if I wish for a secession spy!"

"Hang me then, if you can! But Emily Fairleigh will never marry such a cur as you!"

"What?" Bishop took a step forward. "If you were not an old man——"

"I will never be younger, and I am young enough for you!" shouted the planter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASK IS OFF.

Will was intensely interested. Ordinarily he would have moved on. But in some way he felt a powerful motive to listen.

The conversation was heated. Bishop stood angrily before the planter.

Just then a figure came out from behind a tall bush. It was Gray, white to the lips and intensely angry.

"You hound!" he gritted. "I will kill you for insulting this aged man!"

Bishop's swollen face grew purple. He glared at Gray.

"You!" he gritted. "Oh, I see! You are sweet on Miss Fairleigh. You are jealous. Bah! You are not fit to kiss the ground she walks on!"

"Royal Bishop!" said Gray in a hard-set tone, "I am not to be thwarted by you. Emily Fairleigh is my betrothed wife. You have no claim upon her!"

Bishop stared in amazement. He looked from Gray to the planter.

"Is this true, sir?" he asked. "Is this fellow really engaged to Miss Fairleigh?"

The planter bowed.

"He is!" he replied.

Bishop leaned upon his sword and laughed. So scornful was the laugh, so mocking his accent, that the planter stared in wonderment at Gray.

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, well! That is easily spoiled! Engaged to Miss Fairleigh, eh? Break the engagement, Gray! Break it now while you are able. Don't give her the start. Ha, ha, ha!"

White and shivering with fury and what Will believed was fear, Gray stood before the Union colonel. Matthew Cotton was dumbfounded.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked. "Will you explain, Gray?"

"Yes!" said Gray. "He is a liar and a villain. I challenge him to a death duel with swords!"

But just then the figure of a young woman came down from the porch. Emily Fairleigh had heard every word.

At sight of her there was silence.

She walked quietly to Gray's side.

"Colonel Bishop," she said, in a firm voice, "I wish to say that I cannot in any way consider an offer of marriage from you. I am engaged to Lieutenant Gray, and I shall marry him!"

Bishop stood a moment as if appalled. His fat face grew almost ashen gray. He took off his cap and said:

"God bless you, Miss Fairleigh! I hope heaven will protect you forever. But you know not what you do!"

"Coward!" hissed Gray, half starting forward. "You dare not tell. I——"

He checked himself. But the words were spoken. His manner more than aught else gave the young Southern girl a start. For an instant she trembled.

"What does all this mean?" she asked of her lover. "What does he say?"

"He is a liar and a coward!" hissed Gray.

"That is something I cannot permit!" said Bishop, whipping out his sword. "I will send my corporal for your sword and we will settle the matter here in good fair style. If I win the girl is mine, and I will forever hold my lips. If I lose she is yours!"

Gray's face wore a sneer as he replied:

"Nothing you can say will destroy her trust in me. As for making her the bone of contention between us, heaven forbid!"

"But you have insulted me, and I demand satisfaction!"

"I am in no position to fight you. I am your prisoner!"

"I give you all the chance, sir, in the world. You know that you are only nominally a prisoner. It is only a blind to deceive your people!"

There was a biting significance in his words. Gray, with increased pallor, hissed in reply:

"You shall be court-martialed for that. Look out what you say!"

"I don't fear it," said Bishop, loftily. "What if I do betray you? You will only merit your fate!"

For the first time Emily's face showed a trace of fear and distrust. She stepped instinctively back.

"What does he mean, Walter?" she asked, sternly. "Explain it all!"

Gray was ashen in color. He trembled like an aspen. He tried to speak, but the words rattled in his throat.

Bishop, however, bowed low and said:

"Miss Fairleigh, your beautiful presence has won my heart, and whether I am successful or not in winning reciprocation, I cannot see you go to your fate without a word of warning!"

"I do not understand you, sir!"

"Then I will be plain. This fellow before you, who has

made you believe, no doubt, that he is loyal to the Confederacy, is both a traitor and a spy!"

A hoarse gurgling cry escaped Gray's lips. He would have sprung at Bishop, but the latter held his sword point out.

"Keep back!" he said, coldly. "I shall be compelled to run you through like a toad if you attack me. Now, Miss Fairleigh, you know the truth!"

"It is a lie!" hissed Gray, frantically. "You will not believe him, Emily. And you, Mr. Cotton——"

But Emily had stepped back to the planter's side. Horror and scorn were in the young girl's face.

As for Cotton, his eyes blazed. His manner was of utmost contempt.

"What have you to say, Gray?" he demanded. "Can you disprove this accusation?"

"It is a lie!" hissed Gray.

So excited was Will he unconsciously stepped forth. He saw now that it was to the duplicity of Gray that he owed his present disaster and the fact that he and his brave boys were prisoners of war.

"It is the truth!" said Bishop in a convincing way. "I can prove it wholly to your satisfaction, Mr. Cotton. He has long been selling information about your defences and army to the Federal War Board. It was his plot that brought the Virginia Grays into the present trap. Now you have the whole story!"

"So, the truth is out!" cried Will Prentiss, with blazing eyes, unable longer to control himself. "The mask is off! Gray, I long suspected you. I was a fool to trust you!"

Gray stood like a statue. Denial was upon his lips, but his face convicted him.

"Traitor!" cried the planter, with heat. "You deserve to be shot. Colonel Bishop, I hope you will turn him over to our authorities!"

Like a cornered fox Gray turned to his sweetheart.

"Emily! Will you believe this charge against me? Will you not stand by me in this hour of trial?"

"I cannot stand by a man who sells his country!" said the young girl, scathingly. "Not by a traitor!"

"But—I love you madly! It was all for your sake! I am poor, and you could not live in poverty. Oh, forgive me, and believe me that it was all for you!"

In broken, pleading tones he held out his hands to her. But the proud Southern spirit of the girl could not stand the strain. To her, honor was before all.

"I am sorry for you, Walter Gray!" she said firmly. "I believed in you as an honorable man. It is a lame defence that you did it all for me. But you have stained your soul with a crime greater than any other in life. I cannot give my love to one so devoid of honor and of truth!"

"What? You break your engagement?" cried Gray.

"Yes! I do not wish to look upon your face again!"

The villain started toward her, but the planter stepped before him.

"Not a step further, you traitor!" said Cotton, sternly. "Old as I am I will chastise you!"

A murderous hiss escaped Gray's lips. He made a mo-

tion to strike Cotton. But Colonel Bishop stepped forward.

"Lieutenant Gray, you are under arrest!" he said coldly. "Miss Fairleigh, I beg you will place yourself under my protection!"

"I choose to remain under the protection of Mr. Cotton," said Emily. "I thank you, Colonel Bishop, but I will ask a pass from you to leave for my home in the morning!"

Colonel Bishop bowed.

"Every wish of yours shall be considered," he said. "But let us wait until morning comes. Perhaps you may then change your mind."

At this moment a couple of soldiers appeared in response to his signal.

"Put this man Gray under close arrest!" he said sharply.

"I object!" said Gray, angrily. "I am not subordinate to your order. You have no right to detain me!"

"Haven't I?" asked Bishop. "Why not?"

"I am in the employ of the Secret Service Bureau. You cannot interfere with my movements. Sewed in the lining of my coat is an order to that effect from General McClellan!"

"You see!" said Bishop, blandly. "He admits that he is a spy! Take him away!"

Protesting in vain, Gray was led away. Miss Fairleigh clung to Matthew Cotton. But Will Prentiss, who had said nothing until this moment, stepped forward.

"Miss Fairleigh, I trust that you will call upon me in case you need protection!" he said. "I am afraid there is a serious outlook for us all!"

Bishop had walked away, and Gray had been led away by the guard. Matthew Cotton said, in a low tone:

"Come to the house, Will. We will talk the matter over."

So Will accompanied Cotton and Miss Fairleigh to the house. The planter led the way to his own room.

Then he sent Cuffy for wine, and, seating himself in his great chair, said in his abrupt way:

"Hang me, but I don't like that Yankee colonel. I believe he is serving his own deep ends!"

"I am with you on that," said Will. And then he paused, for Emily had seemed to grow suddenly faint.

A draught of the wine revived her, and the big-hearted planter chafed her hands and caressed her brow in his rough manner.

"There, there, Sis! Don't you mind!" he said, sympathetically. "You are well rid of the fellow. It's lucky we found him out!"

Just at that moment Julia came in, and when Emily had revived she went away with her.

When the two girls had gone Will and the old planter looked at each other. For a moment there was silence.

Then Cotton brought his big hands together forcibly.

"I tell you I don't like that Yankee colonel!" he said. "The other fellow is a scoundrel, but I think Bishop is worse!"

"I have not a very high opinion of him myself," said Will. "But we are at present in his hands."

"I consider Gray a traitor and a villain, but I don't re-

spect Bishop for betraying him." The planter leaned forward.

"I wonder if you have noticed that he is smitten with Miss Fairleigh?"

"I have!" replied Will.

"Well," said the planter impressively, "there is just where we are going to have trouble. I know that Emily abhors him. As you say, we are at present in his hands. I believe him to be unscrupulous and a downright villain. He will not stop at anything to gain his ends. Mark my word for that!"

"Then," said Will quietly, "we must be on our guard. My parole here forbids my escape, or I would try and get away. Miss Fairleigh is, I believe, in peril, and it is well for her to leave here at once!"

"I believe you, my boy. I will try and get her away. But that will not be an easy thing to do!"

"Do you believe that?"

"I know it. We are watched constantly by Bishop and his men."

"What can he do? Will he dare to forbid her leaving here?"

"I believe he is sufficiently unscrupulous."

"But what will that avail him? She will never accept his suit?"

The planter's face hardened.

"Oh, there is the fear that gnaws at my heart!" he said. "Suppose he tries a more desperate game? He is in power here. No doubt he can carry out his game successfully if he so chooses and employ force. If I thought such a thing possible"—the planter's voice grew hard—"I would kill him now!"

Will, much excited, arose.

"Something must be done and at once," he said. "Alas, we are so powerless!"

Just then there was a rap on the door of the room. Cotton started and called out:

"Who is there?"

In response the door swung open and on the threshold stood Bishop.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE PRISON PEN.

For a moment there was a tableau. Will and the planter stood looking at the intruder with startled manner. There was a cold smile upon Bishop's face.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said in his sardonic way. "I thought I should find you here, so I came here. I hope I do not intrude. Is it so?"

Will did not smile, but his face grew hard and stern. The planter arose and glared at Bishop.

"It can scarcely be deemed anything else," he said. "I shall be pleased if you state your business!"

"It is of a private nature," he said, looking at Will.

"I have full confidence in my young friend," said the planter. "You may speak freely."

"I will leave," said Will. But the planter put up his hand.

"I prefer that you should stay," he said. "Now, Colonel Bishop, state your business. I am a sympathizer with the Southern cause. In your position you may raid my plantation, you may subject me to all sorts of indignities. But you cannot alter my sentiments. The young lady who is in my charge has suffered a hard blow to-day. She wishes to return to her home. I hope you will permit her to pass your lines."

The Union colonel frowned, and for a moment was silent.

"Does she wish to pass them?" he asked.

"She does?"

"I will consider the request," he said. "As the matter stands at present you will understand why I can allow no one who might carry information to leave this camp."

"She is a lady of high honor. She will give her word not to do so."

"It is impossible at present to do so," said Bishop. "Perhaps, after I have made a certain statement, she may alter her mind and decide to stay."

"What do you mean?"

Bishop smiled in his gross, self-confident way. He squared his shoulders, and replied:

"Well, to be plain, the young woman has been disappointed in the man she loved. I know what that means to a woman. I stand ready to offer her a true heart and a strong arm for life. I shall be proud to offer her my love, for I do love her better than I do my life!"

For a moment not a word was spoken. Will was cold and silent. The planter looked at Bishop from beneath beetling brows, keen and piercing.

"Do you mean that?"

"I do!"

"I don't believe you!"

"What?"

"That is true, sir. I doubt your sincerity, and I will tell you why. In a dishonorable way you betrayed Gray that you might win favor in her eyes and clear the path for your suit!"

"All is fair in love and war!"

"Very well, sir! But, without going further, I will say that you have not a ghost of a chance with the young woman."

Bishop's face darkened.

"Do you believe that?"

"I know it!"

"Why should she object to me? I have a good commission in the Union Army. The war will soon be over. Then North and South will be united, old feuds will be forgotten. I have money and position. I can make her happy. My heart is set upon winning her, and I will do it!"

"Humph!" said the planter, with a shrug. "You don't know much about women or you would not say that!"

"But I mean it!"

There was a significance in Bishop's words which was not

lost. Will and Cotton exchanged glances, but said nothing.

"I came here to ask your advice and assistance," said Bishop. "I find, however, that you are not in sympathy with my purpose. I see that it will be necessary for me to push my suit alone and without aid."

He bowed and left the room. When he had gone Cotton arose with a groan.

"The worst has come, Will," he said. "We must act quickly or all is lost!"

"What do you propose to do?" asked Will.

"Get Emily out of this camp at the earliest possible moment."

"Can it be done?"

"It must be done!"

The planter strode up and down the room for a few moments. Then he said:

"I have the plan. The picket guard just below the negro cabins is known to me. I have often passed him without question when he was on duty. Unless he has received orders to the contrary, it will be easy for me to pass him to-night with Emily. Once we are outside the line, swift horses will take us westward to a point of safety. But it must be done at once!"

"At once!" agreed Will.

"And you——"

"I cannot go. I am a prisoner of war and have given my parole."

"That is too bad. But you shall not be a prisoner long after I get away from here. You may depend upon that!"

"Do you believe it possible to effect our rescue?" asked Will eagerly.

"I do! I shall by the quickest messenger send to Beauregard for a sufficient force to cut off and surround these regiments!"

"I pray you may succeed," whispered the boy captain. "Oh, I shall pray eagerly for your success!"

The young captain wrung the honest planter's hand. Then he left the room.

He walked down the broad stairs and out upon the porch. A number of Union officers sat there.

Will was about to pass them, when suddenly a couple of guards stepped before him. One of them said:

"Captain Prentiss, I have orders to take up your parole. We must escort you to the prison quarters!"

Will was dumbfounded. He could not speak and suffered the guards to lead him away without objection.

It was a sudden and startling blow. He saw the cunning hand of Colonel Bishop in it.

Remonstrance would have availed nothing. In a few moments Will was in the circle of guards with his comrades and restricted to the same small area to which they were.

That the boy captain was angry and disgusted goes without saying. But it was a matter that couldn't be helped.

Joe Spotswood, who was nursing his wound, welcomed his young captain.

"How is this?" he cried. "What has brought you here, captain?"

"I hardly know myself," replied Will. "My parole was rescinded."

"Humph! That's a regular Yankee trick! Well, we have been hoping that Beauregard would remember us, and send some one to pull us out of this scrape."

Will felt utterly hopeless at the moment. He could see but little hope. Surely the chance for betterment was slight.

Bishop had placed him beyond the possibility of playing the part of champion to Miss Fairleigh. He had no doubt that the villain would play some such scoundrelly game upon Cotton next.

Thus far the planter had been compelled to feed the Confederate prisoners.

But now his stock of foodstuff began to run out. There was no way to replenish it now that the plantation could not be worked.

The days passed, and when the feeding of the prisoners became a serious question, Bishop planned raids to replenish his larder.

His men went out into the country about and scoured it well.

But the fare of the prisoners grew more scant. The boys began to look gaunt and hollow-eyed. It was a desperate time.

Will knew little of what was going on in the house. He never saw Miss Fairleigh and the planter was not allowed to visit him.

The boy captain was quite discouraged. But thus matters were when one day Joe Champney, one of the bravest of the Grays, came to him and said:

"Captain, what would you say to a plan for escape?"

"Escape?" gasped Will. "I should say at once that it is impossible."

"Well, it is not!"

"What do you mean?"

Champney lowered his voice.

"The underground railroad," he said. "The tunnel will let us out. We have it all completed!"

"The tunnel!" gasped Will. "Do you mean that?"

"Certainly I do!"

"Where is the tunnel?"

"Do you see that clump of bushes over there? It is under that!"

Will was astounded. The matter seemed to him utterly chimerical. That a tunnel could be constructed right under the nose of the guard seemed incredible.

But still Champney insisted that it was true.

"We have made it with our hands and the aid of a couple of spade bayonets," he said. "The ground is compact and favorable for tunnelling. Of course, the first rain may fill it up and spoil it. For that reason we must use it at once, and we shall make the attempt to-night."

Will was astonished beyond measure. At the same time he was thrilled with delight and hope.

Escape seemed to him a harbinger of new hopes. He no longer felt compunctions about attempting it, for his parole had been rescinded.

The existence of the tunnel had been unsuspected by Bishop or his men.

It might be said that the Union colonel's discipline was lax. He was by far too fond of high living and a round of dissipation to give proper attention to his duties.

So it was not strange that the guards were careless and that the prisoners were able to carry on their work unsuspected.

CHAPTER IX.

A BID FOR LIBERTY.

Will at the first opportunity inspected the tunnel. It was nothing more than a hole dug in the firm soil through which a man could crawl.

It emerged in a thicket in a small ravine beyond the picket lines and was over one hundred yards in length.

The labor of constructing this hole in the ground was almost infinite. Coupled as it was with the fear of detection, it can be understood that the task was a remarkable one.

The dirt had been brought out in small quantities and judiciously distributed about the area so that it would not be noticed.

Of course, there was the horrible possibility of a cave-in and being buried alive while making the passage. But this did not deter the daring projectors of the scheme.

The tunnel had reached completion that morning.

Plans had been laid for the escape during the night.

One by one the boys were to pass through, and, gaining the ravine, were to form at a safe distance beyond. It would then be an easy matter to strike for Pleasant Valley and thence for Beauregard's line.

Once there or in some place of safety Will could call for reinforcements and organize a party to go to the Cotton plantation and surround Bishop and his men.

The boy captain was enthused with the daring possibility. It already seemed a certainty.

With anxiety and thrilling anticipations the day passed for the Virginia Grays. When evening finally came, every one was on the qui-vive.

Joe Spotswood was perhaps the coolest of all. He had firm faith in the enterprise.

All this while Will had no news of Matthew Cotton or his two female charges. For aught he knew Bishop had carried out his bullying plans and threats. Will saw nothing of the planter.

But that evening, while all were in waiting for the hour to come for the proposed escape, a little negro boy slipped by one of the guards.

He came directly to Will in an eager manner and gave him a note. Then he rolled his eyes and said in a low tone:

"Ole Massa Cotton, he gib me dis fo' yo'!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Will. "Is that so? Wait a moment, my boy."

Will read the note with a thrill.

"Dear Prentiss: We are in a hard position. Bishop has caused Miss Fairleigh to be placed under guard on the trumped-up charge of being a spy. She is confined in one room and none of us are permitted to see her. This man Bishop is the biggest scoundrel unhung. For myself, I am placed under the closest restriction. I chafe bitterly, but it is of no use. We are helpless. I have tried to leave here several times, but have been stopped. Beauregard must be asleep. I am afraid Bishop is putting up a game to abduct Miss Fairleigh. This is a dark hour for us all. I have no more news. Only God knows what the future can hold.

"Yours anxiously, MATTHEW COTTON."

Will read the message again. Then he wrote on the back with a pencil hastily:

"Dear Cotton: Have good cheer. I cannot give you details, but the future promises better things. An unexpected event is at hand. Wait and have patience. From
"PRENTISS."

Will gave this to the boy, who dodged away. The next moment he saw his folly.

In passing the guard line a musket was leveled at him and the guard cried:

"Stop, you infernal little nigger! Where is that paper the prisoner gave you?"

"Hain't seen no such fink!" said the boy. "Don' yo' shoot dis chile. I'se Massa Cotton's boy!"

"I don't care whose boy you are. You have received a paper from one of the prisoners and I want to see it."

"Yo' kain't see it!" cried the little coon, as he made a dive across the line. The guard pressed the trigger.

Crack! A wild shriek of agony went up on the air.

The little negro pitched forward upon his face. Blood welled from his mouth. From his tent sprung Colonel Bishop. Other officers appeared.

In an instant the colonel strode forward and demanded:

"What's the matter there, guard? Who did you fire at?"

"There he is, sir!" said the guard. "I am acting under orders. That little nigger crossed the line, and he wouldn't stop when I called to him."

Bishop advanced with a hard light in his eyes.

He kicked the inanimate form of the little negro boy.

"What was he doing beyond the dead line? What was he up to, sentry?"

"He received a note from one of the prisoners, sir!"

Bishop turned like a flash.

"A note, eh? From which one?"

"From that young fellow over there," pointing to Will. The young captain, horrified, now started for the dead figure of the little messenger.

"This is infamous!" he cried. "This is murder! Stand out of the way, you vile coward! If you have killed that boy, you will answer to me!"

"Back!" cried Bishop, savagely. "Throw him back there, guard!"

Others of the guard had reached the spot. They forced the boy captain back. Will was very angry. His Virginia Grays were at his back, and, though they were unarmed, they were ready to give their lives if he had said the word.

"What's the life of a nigger!" cried Bishop, contemptuously. "You gave him a note, did you, Prentiss? Get that note, guard! See, he has it in his fingers!"

The guard tore the bit of paper from the hand of the dead boy. He handed it to Colonel Bishop.

The Union colonel read it, and arched his brows. He looked at Will and smiled in a cold way.

"So there is a certainty that an important event is near at hand, eh? That event means escape, of course. I would like very much to know just how you are going to escape! I think I will have an investigation made!"

The significance of his words could not be mistaken. Will could have cut his tongue off for what he said next as most ill-advised.

"Wait until we do escape! We will very quickly turn the tables, as you will soon see!"

Even as he spoke he saw a warning light in Joe Spotswood's eyes. But it was too late.

Bishop's eyes glared in an exultant way. He laughed scornfully:

"So! I think I can fix matters so that you will not be likely to make good that threat, my dear Prentiss. I wish to tell you also that Miss Fairleigh has about decided to accept my offer. I thought you might like to know. Guard, you did the right thing. Shoot any nigger whom you find near the dead line. Drag his carcass away!"

Two of the soldiers now proceeded to drag the dead body of the negro boy away. Will quivered with horror and rage.

But he was helpless.

Bishop now walked away. In a few moments the guards were increased to double the number.

Joe Spotswood, nervous and excited, which was unusual for him, came up to Will and said:

"I am afraid it's all up, Will. I believe Bishop is dead onto us!"

"He has not yet discovered the tunnel."

"No, but look yonder. There is another line of guards beyond this one! He would never have placed them there if he had not suspected something!"

Will saw that this was a fact. The second line of pickets was beyond the exit of the underground passage.

Anyone emerging from the tunnel at that end must, as it certainly seemed, run full into the second line of guards. This would mean betrayal.

Will was disheartened. It seemed as if fate conspired against him.

He saw that Joe Spotswood's fears were well-founded. What was to be done? Will and Spotswood, with several others of the Grays, discussed the situation.

It was decided that no time must be lost. The attempt must be made early in the evening or as soon as the darkness would permit.

So the Grays waited with much apprehension. As soon as the night was well down they gathered at the tunnel mouth.

Lots were drawn to see which should be the first to get out. Will drew the first one. He was to be the first one out of the tunnel.

So, when the moment came, he crept into the passage. On he crept until suddenly he emerged into a clump of undergrowth.

It was a thrilling moment for young Prentiss. He was much excited, but yet he restrained himself.

But a few yards away were the guards of the outer line. He was for a moment in a quandary.

He waited for the remainder of the little company to appear. But he waited in vain. They did not come.

Will stood for a few moments in the gloom. A short distance away was the beat of the sentry. One line of sentries was in the other direction.

Then he heard an uproar in the prisoners' pen. Lights flashed, musket shots arose upon the air. Loud shouts and exclamations reached his ear.

He knew what it meant. The underground passage had been discovered and pounced upon by Bishop.

All hopes of the little company now seemed to be vain. Will heard a crashing in the undergrowth and signals given the sentries. He knew that the foe were coming after him.

A wild desperation seized upon the boy captain.

He could not think of going back to that prison pen, now that he had just begun to taste the sweets of freedom. He believed that he would die first.

So he made quick action. He darted forward toward the sentry. In a moment he heard the hail:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"A friend!" cried Will as he drew nearer.

"Advance, friend, with the countersign!"

Will drew nearer. He could hear his pursuers. Desperation was upon him. It gave him strength and daring.

He drew as near the guard as he dared. Then he said:

"Let me strike a match. I have it written down, but I have forgotten it. Give me a moment, please!"

Will pretended to draw a paper from his pocket. Then he struck the match. Just what he had expected happened.

The guard glanced at the paper. The light of the match for the instant blinded him.

With a sudden dive, Will went under the guard's bayonet, and, catching his knees, threw the fellow. He went down like a log. The boy captain had a hand at his throat in an instant.

But the fall had stunned the guard, and he was for a moment helpless. Will instantly wrested his musket from him and was master of the situation.

CHAPTER X.

A BRAVE GIRL'S RUSE.

But Will did not pause to argue the matter longer with the picket guard. He could hear the others coming.

With the captured musket, he dashed away into the gloom. In a few moments he struck the highway.

Will had but one thought at the moment, and this was to get as far away from the spot as he could. He ran like a deer.

And soon the sounds of pursuit died out behind him.

Then he knew that he had made good his escape. Will stuck to the highway for miles. As he ran on he grew elated with his good fortune.

For miles he kept on. Then fatigue seized upon him and he sank down by the roadside.

It was a spot where the road descended through a ravine. He could hear the ripple of water below.

It was all music to him, however. He was asleep in a few moments.

When he awoke the sun was shining in his face. He could hardly believe his good fortune. He wondered where he was.

After he had collected his wits he arose and looked about him.

He saw a rambling highway leading down through the trees. He knew not where it led. He was about to resume it when suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs in his rear startled him.

Will had time to step into the bushes. But when he saw what was coming he felt a thrill.

Half a dozen mounted and armed men in Union blue were riding leisurely down. In their midst rode a young woman.

Will recognized her at once as Miss Fairleigh. He saw the cowardly game at once. She was being abducted. Colonel Bishop was carrying out his plans in a subtle way.

A thrilling desire seized Will to try and rescue her. But he saw at once that this could not be done single-handed.

And now a problem confronted him.

The impulse was upon him to follow the guard and learn where Miss Fairleigh was to be taken, with a view to accomplishing her rescue.

But he recalled the fact that his brave Boys in Gray were in limbo and duty demanded that he push on and secure aid and rescue for them.

Which move should he make? For a moment he stood in indecision.

He was divided between duty and chivalry. But the latter won.

Will turned and followed the horsemen. They were going at a slow pace and he was able to easily keep up with them.

Suddenly Miss Fairleigh drew rein. Will crept nearer so that he could hear every word spoken.

"You are not taking me by the right road to German-town!" she said, sharply. "What does this mean? You know that Colonel Bishop gave you strict orders to escort me to that place!"

The sergeant in charge of the squad saluted and said:

"Madame, we are obeying orders. We cannot do otherwise!"

"But Colonel Bishop's orders were to take me to German-town!" she cried.

The sergeant bowed again.

"Those orders he countermanded later," he said. "We are to take you to Crows' Nest. No harm shall come to you."

Emily Fairleigh's face grew white. The first suspicion of the deadly trap came to her.

"Where is Crows' Nest?" she demanded. "What sort of a place is it? Why am I taken there?"

"Those questions you must ask Colonel Bishop himself. I cannot answer them!"

"This is a treacherous game!" cried the young girl with spirit. "Now I know why Mr. Cotton and Julia were not permitted to go with me. This is infamous! I appeal to your honor! If you are men you will defend me against this scoundrel!"

The pleading in her voice was such as should have moved a heart of stone. Will was deeply moved and felt like springing to her relief.

But Bishop had picked his men well. They were stoic, even sardonic. The sergeant was respectful, but firm.

"I cannot help it, Miss. We are soldiers and are under orders!"

Then Emily Fairleigh showed her Southern spirit. She pressed her heel into her horse's side and wheeled him quickly.

So sudden was the move that she caused the sergeant's

horse to rear and plunge. The other riders started forward to intercept her.

"Stop her!" yelled the sergeant. Stop, Miss Fairleigh, or we will shoot!"

"Shoot me if you will, you cowards!" she cried forcibly. "Better death than the fate which you are leading me to!"

Desperate efforts were made to clutch her bridle rein. She rained blows right and left on the horses with her riding crop. She seemed endowed with the strength of a resolute man.

Will was so excited that he forgot his position and dashed out into the open to, if possible, assist her to make her escape good.

One burly fellow had really got a grip on her rein. Will seized a heavy stone from the roadbed and hurled it at him.

It struck the trooper behind the ear. In an instant he reeled and fell from his horse. The animal turned into the bushes and became entangled by the reins.

Miss Fairleigh had now cleared the gang and was away down the road like an arrow.

"After her!" yelled the sergeant. They disregarded Will.

Away they went after the escaping young girl, firing their pistols into the air to stop her. Will was almost beside himself with joy. He saw that Miss Fairleigh had a good horse and was likely to escape.

For a moment he watched the chase. Then he looked about him.

A startling thought came to him. On the ground lay the senseless trooper. In the bushes entangled by the reins was the horse.

It was easy enough for Will Prentiss to decide upon a plan of action. It did not take him long to possess himself of the trooper's sword and pistols. Then he freed the horse from the bushes.

In a moment he was upon its back and dashing away down the road after the others.

As Will rode he saw Miss Fairleigh turn to the left through the field. He saw that her purpose was to gain the cover of woods far to the south.

She showed by her daring horsemanship that she was used to cross-country riding.

Her horse was a splendid leaper and she put him to the rail fences with rare skill and courage.

The pursuers dared not take the fences which she took with ease. They were compelled often to pause and pull off the top rails.

On went the chase. Will now decided to take a course which he saw would bring him to the woods at about the same time as Miss Fairleigh.

He found that his horse would leap, so he put him over the fences in reckless fashion. Steadily the young woman had gained on her pursuers.

And now Will saw that she had really won her race.

The woods were quite near and he turned his horse into a deep-cut lane and rode towards her. She turned her head and saw him coming.

For a moment an expression of alarm showed upon her face. Then Will swung his arm and shouted:

"Miss Fairleigh! You know me! Have no fear! I am come to help you!"

Surprise, as well as pleasure, showed in her face. She drew rein slightly for Will to come alongside.

"Oh, Captain Prentiss!" she cried. "How came you here? You escaped——"

"I did!" replied Will. "By the merest chance I saw you in the company of those troopers. It was the treachery of Bishop?"

"Yes! He led me to believe that I was to have my freedom and a safe escort to Germantown. He is a villain!"

"He is certainly that! By great good fortune I escaped. Now, Miss Fairleigh, I am at your service. See, the pursuers have given up. I think we are safe. Do you know this region at all?"

"No!" replied Emily. "It is wholly unknown to me."

"I know little of it myself. But the roads leading to the south must eventually bring us to Beauregard's line."

"I hope so."

They were now in the woods, which were open and devoid of underbrush, so that they could ride on with ease.

For a long time they threaded their way through the dense growth. The horses breathed hard with their efforts and finally Will drew rein. Emily did the same, saying:

"I think we had better rest the animals a while. Yonder is a good cool spring of water to refresh us all!"

So they dismounted. It was just at the bottom of a little slope. Great oaks crowned the eminence. A dingle filled the bottom land and the spring was in the edge of this. Luxurious grass fringed it about.

Will drew water from the spring, and they sat down upon a fallen tree. The horses drank and cropped the grass. It was a delightful spot.

They chatted upon various topics. Their tastes seemed to be kindred, and Will was bound to admit that of all the young women he had ever met Emily Fairleigh was the most attractive.

Had Will Prentiss been an impressionable youth he might have yielded to the goddess of love then and there. But he was a young soldier, and he was fighting for his country. Such matters, therefore, could not claim him.

So he contented himself with being chivalrous and gallant. Finally one of the horses became entangled in the underbrush of the dingle and Will went to release him.

As he peered through the copse he was given a thrilling start.

He could see some distance down the glen beyond. He saw some three or four hundred yards away a number of men reclining upon a slope.

He was doubly thrilled when he saw that they wore uniforms of gray. In an instant he dropped the rein of his horse and plunged through the dingle. But just as he emerged into the open a voice called in an ominous tone:

"Halt! Who goes there!"

"Friends!" cried Will. "It seems good to see the gray once more. I am Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays. Who are you?"

The picket gave a great cry and flung down his musket.

"Hooray! It's our captain come back at last. We've hunted the country over for you. Hooray, comrades! Here is Captain Prentiss!"

And big Joe Brown, for he was the picket, fairly embraced Will. Then down came the rest of the Grays on the run.

Fred Randolph was overcome with the most intense joy. The boys under his command had managed to escape capture and ever since had been trying to learn the fate of their captain and his comrades.

It did not take long for explanations.

"We saw Colonel English was bound to be beaten," said Fred. "So we drew off and tried to gain his rear to support him. We found this impossible and superior bodies of the enemy kept pushing us back until we were unable to get anywhere near Cotton's plantation. We have been trying ever since to learn what became of you and the rest of the boys."

"We have been prisoners of war," said Will. "Only last night I escaped, and by the best of fortune saw you resting here."

"Prisoners of war!" cried Fred. "Is there no chance to rescue them?"

"That remains to be seen. For the present we must keep on our guard, for the Union lines are strong at this point. But why has not General Beauregard sent forces up here to drive the invaders back?"

"Ten thousand men are now on the way," said Fred. "You will see heavy fighting about Cotton's place in a day or two."

"By the way," cried Will suddenly, "I almost forgot. I have a young woman in my charge who escaped from the persecutions of Colonel Bishop, who is the vilest scoundrel

in the Union Army. I must acquaint her with this good news."

But Emily Fairleigh had followed Will through the dingle and now appeared on the scene. The boys crowded about, and when they learned the story from Will they cheered the young woman in true Southern fashion.

CHAPTER XI.

TO THE RESCUE.

"How many men have you under your command, Fred?" asked Will.

"You left forty of the boys with me. But as we have marched through the country we have found boys to recruit our ranks up to seventy-two, all told."

"Good!" cried the young captain, with delight. "That is the best of news. If we can rescue Spotswood and his boys we shall have our full quota and more."

"Let us lose no time."

"Wait! It will be impossible for us to do that alone. Bishop is very heavily backed by General Ward. We must wait until we can have the aid of reinforcements."

"That is bound to come! General Beauregard has ten thousand Boys in Gray swinging up the Pleasant Valley to hit the Union line and drive it back!"

"Ten thousand! There will hardly be a battle. If the Union officers are wise they will retreat."

"Well, in any event, we must plan to rescue the prisoners."

Will was thoughtful a moment.

"I think it can be done!" he said. "We must plan to throw a body of men in between the plantation and Germantown and cut Bishop off!"

"Capital! We are not strong enough, however, to do that."

"Oh, by no means! We can co-operate with a regiment or two. My plan is to advance and meet Beauregard's troops. I know that we may depend upon assistance to carry out our plan."

"Good! And on the way we can escort Miss Fairleigh to a point of safety within our lines."

"Just so!"

So the plan was made. Emily Fairleigh was much worried about Matthew Cotton and Julia.

"Bishop is a revengeful fellow," she said. "No doubt he will try to wreak his vengeance upon them."

"If he does we will give him short shrift when we capture him," said Will.

The Virginia Grays had encamped on the spot only for

the purpose of eating their noon meal. Now that it was over, they extinguished their camp-fires and fell into line.

Will now took command once more. All would have been complete indeed had the rest of the company been with him.

It was believed that by marching west to the upper end of Rock Run they would meet Beauregard's advance guard.

So this plan was adopted. In this way they could reach the highway leading to Centreville, and from this point Emily Fairleigh would be safe with a single escort to ride on to Manassas, where she had friends.

The Grays pushed on at a good pace. The country was rolling and wooded. It was an ideal region for ambushes.

But the Union troops had not penetrated thus far into the region. So they kept on without danger or hindrance.

That night they encamped at cross roads but a short distance from Rocky Run. It was midnight when the picket came in with the information that troops were advancing up the south road.

In an instant the camp fires were extinguished and the Grays sought the cover of the woods.

The distant tramp of feet could be heard.

What was the meaning of this night march? Were they Confederates or Union soldiers? This it was necessary to ascertain first of all.

Will sent scouts down the road. These returned highly excited.

"They are the Boys in Gray!" they declared. "They are in heavy force. There is artillery and a body of cavalry!"

"It is Beauregard's relief!" cried Fred. "We are in luck, Will. Now to cut off Bishop!"

Will, much interested, went down the road with Fred. They stood in the road as the advance guard came up and were hailed.

"We want to see your commanding officer," said Will. This was General Wade, who rode but a short distance behind the advance guard.

In a few moments Will and Fred were beside the Confederate general and conferring with him.

"We shall halt at Rock Run," said General Wade. "Let your company fall in and march thither with us. We will go into camp there and then we can talk matters over."

Will at once gave orders for the Grays to fall into the line of march. And thus they went on.

It was near morning when the position on Rock Run was reached. The Confederate soldiers made camp.

General Wade's tent was pitched and then he sent for the two young officers of the Grays.

"Now I will listen to your story," he said. "You tell me that you were prisoners of war?"

"Yes!" replied Will. "Part of my company is now in

limbo at Cotton's plantation, where Colonel Bishop has over a thousand men under his command."

"Indeed! That is near where Colonel English was driven back?"

"Yes!"

"Very good! Now to consider your proposition. I am going to try and throw my forces around General Ward's left wing. That will hardly take me as far north as Cotton's plantation."

"Very good, sir!" cried Will eagerly. "If you will only send one or two regiments up there to cut Bishop off we can rescue our boys and also cut the Union line of communication."

General Wade's eyes snapped. He consulted his maps a moment.

"That would mean that Ward must fight to the death or surrender," he said.

"Yes!"

"That is a clever scheme, Prentiss. I am going to adopt it. If it succeeds you shall have the credit of it."

"I do not seek the credit, sir. I only wish to rescue my comrades!"

"Well! You shall have the regiments. I will send Colonels Martin and Hinkley with their regiments. I will instruct them to follow your guidance and instruction."

"Thank you, General Wade!" said Will with great delight. "I feel sure that we shall succeed in our purpose!"

"I trust so!"

"I have another matter I would like to speak of," said Will.

"Ah! What is it?"

With this he told the story of Bishop's villainy and the flight of Miss Fairleigh. General Wade listened with interest. His fine face showed anger.

"The scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "I know the Fairleighs well. I will see that Miss Emily is safely returned to her people. Leave that matter to me, Captain Prentiss."

When Will went back to his company he was in high spirits. He communicated the result of his interview to Miss Fairleigh, and she was greatly pleased.

"I know General Wade well," she said. "It is very kind of him, and I appreciate it deeply. But, Captain Prentiss, I feel that I owe much to you. I trust we may meet again."

Will bowed low. There was color in the young girl's face as their eyes met.

"I thank you, Miss Fairleigh. It is hard to tell what the future holds for us all. I am a soldier and my duty demands that I risk my life for my country. It may be that I shall be compelled to give it freely in her defence. But if I live until the war is over I shall hope to see you again."

The young girl's pale, beautiful face flushed and her lips trembled.

"My prayers shall go with you, Captain Prentiss," she said. "I know you are noble and good, and the able defender of the weak and helpless. It would be a great loss to the Confederacy if aught happened to you."

They parted, but Will never saw Emily Fairleigh again. The perfidy of Lieutenant Gray, no doubt, had proved a great shock, and before many months the sad tidings came to the boy captain that she had died in a Richmond hospital, where she had given her services as a nurse.

That morning two regiments were detached from General Wade's brigade. Will Prentiss and his company were to act as guides.

Of course, his rank was inferior to that of the two colonels, and he had not supreme command, but his counsel was to be heeded and his directions obeyed by order of the general.

The two regiments were soon en route for Cotton's plantation. Will was somewhat in doubt as to what road it was best to take in order to strike the foe at the most vulnerable point.

It was Fred Randolph's belief that the best plan was to strike Bishop at the point where Colonel English had met his defeat.

"Bishop holds the extreme right of the Union line," he argued. "We will simply act as a wedge in cutting him off from the rest of the line, and by driving him northward surround him and bring him to terms at your leisure."

Colonel Hinkley was in favor of attacking him from the north, and thus by forcing him back turn the Union flank entirely.

But Will said, with clear logic:

"That would avail only as a temporary victory. Doubtless we could drive him back, but it would be upon his own line, and, with Ward's entire army to back him up, we would not succeed in capturing him or in gaining any material end, for we have not sufficient force to follow and roll up the whole Union line."

"I think we have," said Hinkley, "if Wade attacks their centre."

But Colonel Martin agreed with Will.

"I think Prentiss is right," he said. "A quick dash will cut Bishop off and force him to retreat northward. The rest of the Union line will be engrossed with General Wade. We will surely win a victory!"

So the plan was finally adopted. They had now reached a point from whence the camp fires of the Union line could be seen.

A deep ravine cut their line at this point. On the side

and crest of this ravine were intrenchments. To the north extended Bishop's line to Cotton's farm.

Will's advice was to charge along the crest of land and capture the intrenchments. A couple of companies could be thrown into them to hold them and keep the rest of the line back.

Then the rest of the Confederate force could double the Union line right up and drive it back beyond the plantation. Then the men in the intrenchments could retreat in time to save capture.

But again Colonel Hinkley objected.

He wanted to divide the regiments and send one north to head Bishop off in his retreat.

"Why, he will escape us," he said. "There will be nothing to stop him."

"Yes, there will," said Will.

"What?"

"The Potomac river. Once we got him headed in that direction he is done for!"

"Why, of course," said Colonel Martin. "It is easy to see that Prentiss is right. If he keeps on he will run into a wing of our army."

Hinkley, who was an obstinate fellow, for a long time demurred. He was positive that Bishop ought to be at once surrounded.

Finally, however, he joined sentiment with the other officers. The plan as outlined by Will was adopted.

The Grays were brought up to head the charge along the crest above the ravine. Two companies were to charge through the ravine. On the opposite crest two more companies were to move forward at the same moment.

This meant a general assault upon that part of the line.

"All depends upon quick and desperate work!" said Will.

"Not a moment must be lost. The line must be cut and rolled back instantly. Of course, Bishop will be on his guard the moment firing begins."

"Suppose he moves down to the support of the intrenchments?" asked Hinkley.

"He will not. That would be the worst thing he could do, and Bishop is a good tactician. Have no fear that he will do that, for he is too skilful a soldier to fight down his own line."

"But he will have to change front when we attack the plantation."

"That is another matter. He does not leave his own ground. We have got to attack him in his own position."

Hinkley was compelled to yield to Will's logic. Martin, who was a West Point man, heartily endorsed young Captain Prentiss.

The two regiments deployed along the front of Bishop's

line. But no attack was to be made until the line was cut at the point in the ravine.

The Virginia Grays were all ready for the forward move. The two companies behind them were Georgians and men of nerve and pluck.

The Union pickets had been driven in. Skirmishers were sent against Bishop's end of the line to divert his attention. Once again the ground lost by Colonel English against overpowering numbers was to be fought over.

The word came to move forward. A thin line went ahead to draw the enemy's fire. The Grays, in advance, crept along the ridge, taking advantage of every stump and boulder for cover.

There was nothing in the nature of a surprise in the attack.

The Union soldiers in their intrenchments were ready, and the firing was rapid and deadly.

But the Grays went on and on. Nearer they drew. Now they could see the breastworks.

Young Captain Prentiss sprung up with his sword flashing in air.

"Hurrah, boys!" he shouted. "Charge bayonets! At them, Grays!"

With a wild cheer, the Grays sprang forward. They swept down over the ridge like tigers. A raking fire met them, but it did not stop them.

Brave boys dropped under the leaden hail. But the line did not break. Just at the breastworks they wavered an instant.

"Rally, boys! Rally!"

The cry went up on the air fierce and quivering. It held the brave little company for one second, while they rallied. Then over the breastworks they went.

The Union soldiers could not stand before such a fierce attack. Bravely they resisted, but they were swept back into the next line of intrenchments.

But the companies behind Will now charged past him. They drove the foe out of the second line of intrenchments. Then the cheers from the companies in the ravine told the story that they had also been successful.

Colonel Hinkley's men now went sweeping through, and the line was cut. Quickly men were placed in the intrenchments, and the main part of the two regiments began to roll that part of the line back to Cotton's plantation.

A panic seized Bishop's men. It seemed to them as if the Confederates numbered four times their real force. They retreated in great disorder, and the lanes and fields were strewn with their equipments.

Down upon the plantation they descended in a terrible rout.

CHAPTER XII.

A FINAL VICTORY.

What Bishop thought when he saw the utter rout of his men can only be imagined. It could not be said that he was a coward on the battlefield.

For he exposed himself freely in the mad effort to hold his men and defend the position he held. But Martin's regiment was now sweeping up the highway, while Hinkley was crossing the field.

Will, with his Grays, was trying to reach the plantation first in the hopes of freeing his comrades.

Panting and exhausted with their efforts, the Grays reached the last line of rail fence.

From this position they could see the pen where their comrades were encamped. The usual number of guards only held them in check.

But the prisoners of war were cheering madly, for they saw Will and his boys and knew that they were coming to their rescue.

It was an exciting moment. Will was compelled to rest his company a moment at the rail fence. They were too utterly exhausted for the moment.

The air was full of flying bullets, and there was fierce fighting in the lane on the other side of the house.

But scores of the Union soldiers were throwing down their arms and surrendering. It could be only a question of time.

Bishop had seen the Grays, however, and he now ordered a company down between them and the prisoners. They were charging down when Will gave the word:

"Charge, boys! For our comrades, boys!"

With a wild cheer, the Grays went over the rail fence. In another moment they were rushing across the field.

Then the prisoners, with a rush, burst out of their pen. The guards were unable to hold them longer.

Just then Colonel Hinkley came charging up from the other side, and the company sent by Bishop were swept back.

The Grays met their comrades and the reunion was indeed a joyful one. Forgetful of flying bullets, of the sea of fierce fighting about them, they embraced and welcomed each other.

Meanwhile Bishop had ordered a retreat. His men fell back in great confusion. He narrowly escaped capture himself.

Pursuit was maintained for a time. But now a new phase presented itself.

From the intrenchments where the brave boys left behind

to hold the line were fiercely fighting, came a stream of fugitives in gray.

Overwhelming numbers had driven them out and they were coming back upon the plantation. Colonel Martin quickly massed his regiment to receive them.

And as the pursuing line of Union blue reached the highway, they were checked by Martin's hot fire.

So far as the battle was concerned, all was over. The Confederate regiments now took up their retreat, driving Bishop before them.

Just the reverse of what Will had predicted now occurred. Bishop had no chance to halt and reform his men. He was being driven toward the south, and every moment further from his own people.

The result could only be certain capture or extinction. But few of his men were in anything like order.

Detachments were picked up constantly and captured. So the day wore on.

When night came they were ten miles from Cotton's plantation. Will and his Grays had been in front all the while during the long chase.

The boy captain was eager to capture the Union colonel. Hinkley and Martin had halted most of their men, for the pursuit had resulted in the capture of all but a small portion of the Union force.

Not more than two hundred of the Union soldiers were now with Bishop.

These were in a disorganized state. So when darkness fell, Will obtained permission to continue the pursuit with his company.

"I hope you capture him!" said Hinkley. "It is only a question of time."

"I will get him!" declared Will. "He is a disgrace to his own army!"

So in the darkness the Virginia Grays kept up the pursuit. All night they chased the fleeing villain and his men.

At times straggling bodies of the Union regiment were overtaken and sent to the rear. By midnight Will estimated that Bishop had not more than fifty men with him.

The Union colonel was bound to escape, however. He pushed on desperately. But every moment the sleuth hounds in his rear gained upon him.

It was in the early hours of the morning that the end came. The Grays came to the banks of a small stream.

Just fording it was a party of men in blue. As the Grays fired they reached the other bank and held up a white flag of surrender.

Joe Champney and a detail went over to take charge of the prisoners. When they came back with them Bishop, with a cold sneer upon his face, was with them.

"Well, Prentiss," he said harshly, "you got me, didn't you? I gave you a good chase, though."

"Yes, you did, Bishop," agreed Will. "But it is all over!"

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Hold you as a prisoner of war."

"Subject to exchange?"

"That will depend upon General Beauregard. He may decide that you deserve hanging. If he does I cannot save you."

"Well," said Bishop coldly, "I am not afraid to die. But I would like to ask after the health of Miss Fairleigh?"

"She is in the best of health, and in safe hands at Manassas."

"I suppose she takes Gray's duplicity to heart seriously. Now, I would have made her a good, true husband. She was foolish not to console herself with me." And he laughed discordantly.

"But women are uncertain, coy and hard to please. They look for the ideal and overlook their best interests. Ah, well, Prentiss, you are a good fellow. We have simply changed positions. I am a prisoner of war now instead of you, which is, after all, quite fitting."

"I am glad to find that you are a philosopher," said Will. "Rest assured you shall have fully as good treatment as I received."

"Don't put on the thumb screws, Prentiss. I know you can be charitable."

The Grays now set out on their return march. They were in high spirits, for success had crowned their best efforts.

They had extricated themselves from a terrible trap. They had been prisoners of war, but once more freedom was theirs, and they were yet to fight a good battle for the Confederacy.

The boys reached Cotton's plantation in due time and were welcomed by old Matthew Cotton and his daughter.

The planter was in high spirits.

"The tables have turned," he cried. "And we are once again on top, boys. Hurrah for the Confederacy!"

The Boys in Gray caught up the cheer, and it went rolling up in wild chorus. They cheered themselves hoarse.

The resources of the plantation had been well exhausted by Bishop, so that Cotton had little to offer in the way of hospitality.

But the supply train arrived in the meantime, and Colonels Hinkley and Martin sent out a foraging party, which brought in several good fat pigs and a couple of beeves.

These were slaughtered and a barbecue held after the Southern fashion. Thus the Boys in Gray celebrated their victory.

But far away could be seen the flags of the enemy massing for a fresh attack. Will Prentiss knew that it would be foolhardy to stand their ground too long. He consulted with the two colonels.

It was decided to fall back and intrench on a ridge just beyond. Slowly the Confederate columns withdrew and the work of intrenching began.

Far away in the south also there came to their hearing the booming of guns. It was easily comprehended.

General Wade had attacked the main body of General Ward's army. The battle was becoming a hot one.

And now long lines of blue were seen coming down from the ridges beyond. They were viewed by Colonel Hinkley with something like apprehension.

"I am afraid we had better withdraw before so large a body of the foe," he said.

"Pshaw!" said Colonel Martin. "Our position here is almost invulnerable. We can hold ten times our number at bay. There is nothing to fear."

"But it would be too bad to turn this victory into defeat," said Hinkley.

"I think we hardly need fear it," said Will. "Let us stand our ground!"

Nearer came the Union lines. It was a beautiful sight to see the sun flashing upon their muskets and the Stars and Stripes flaunting in the wind.

But now of a sudden something unexpected happened. The Union soldiers had been advancing to attack Colonel Hinkley's men.

They suddenly halted and rapidly changed front. The reason for this was now to be seen.

Down over the ridges came a long gray line. Distant cheering filled the air.

In an instant up sprang the Grays with an answering cheer.

"Wade has broken through. The battle is won. Drive them back to the Potomac!"

But the Union Army of General Ward was already on the retreat. They soon vanished beyond the distant ridges.

Pursuit was not conducted. This was in accordance with General Beauregard's orders.

The reason for it was given later in the fact that it would have drawn the pursuing column too far into the Union lines. This might have resulted in a flank attack that would have been disastrous.

General Beauregard was known as a daring man and a reckless commander. But in this instance he used good discretion beyond doubt.

As the Union forces withdrew firing ceased. Attention was given to burying the dead and caring for the wounded.

The prisoners were marched to Manassas. With them went Colonel Bishop. He was interviewed by General Beauregard in regard to Gray.

Bishop was held for some time a prisoner of war.

Then he was exchanged. It did not happen, however, in the course of the war that Will met him again.

The Virginia Grays marched back to Manassas. When they entered the general encampment thousands flocked to greet them. Their fame had long preceded them, and they were given an ovation.

So ended their Pleasant Valley campaign, as they were pleased to call it.

Some of the brave boys had left their bones on those battlefields. But their places were filled by others.

For a few days the Grays were occupied in reorganization and recruiting. Then one day a message reached the boy captain:

"To Captain Will Prentiss: General Beauregard desires to see you in his tent at once."

Will hastened to answer the summons. When he stood in the presence of the great general he felt abashed. But General Beauregard bent a kindly gaze upon him and said:

"Prentiss, I have a new mission for you and your Grays. Are you ready to accept it?"

"I am quite ready!" replied Will.

"Very good! Seat yourself and I will give you instructions."

With this General Beauregard proceeded to outline an expedition, which Will was bound to admit exceeded any he had ever undertaken for danger and hardship.

"Well," said the general finally, "do you think you are good for it, Prentiss?"

"Yes, sir!" replied the boy captain, in his prompt manner. "My company will be ready in one hour."

What this expedition was and the adventures attendant we shall have to reserve for another story, and herewith wish the reader a kind adieu.

THE END.

Read "ON SPECIAL SERVICE; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE IN DANGER," which will be the next number (?) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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